Arifureta Volume 09

Chapter 1 : Madness and Jealousy

"Shit! Shit! What's with this! What kind of joke is this!"

It was midnight. Inside a park located on the outskirts of the post town, Hol-ad, one boy was cursing in a hushed voice, punching one of the trees repeatedly. It was Hiyama Daisuke. Hiyama's eyes were shaking intensely in hatred, agitation, and impatience. Those were truly ugly and impure eyes, from which it was not an exaggeration to they were full of madness.

"As I thought, you really did lose your temper… well, I know it can't be helped though. After all, your precious, precious princess Kaori was snatched by another man before your eyes, right?"

A voice filled with scorn and slight sympathy rang out from behind such a Hiyama. Fwip, Hiyama immediately turned around. Next, he momentarily raised an expression of relief when he recognized the other person was the one he meeting in secret, and, following that, with his fists clenched, he replied with a voice that was just like a beast's howl.

"Shut up! Shit! This… this shouldn't have happened! Why, why is that bastard alive!? Just why did he did that…"

"Don't be distracted by yourself, I want to have a talk, you know? Also, it will become a serious matter if someone sees us meeting in secret."

"… I, I don't have anymore reasons to go along with you… my Kaori is already…"

In between the trees' shadows created by the moonlight was a person's silhouette, to whom Hiyama bitterly spoke as he pummeled his fists on the tree.

Hiyama cooperating with this person was only because he heard that he would be able to make Kaori his own. That's why, with Kaori leaving, he had lost his reason to cooperate, and it was too late to threaten him with exposing his attempt to kill Hajime as the victim could have said it himself.

However, the person in the darkness smiled as its mouth turned curved into a crescent at such a Hiyama, and it once again tempted him just like the devil.

"If she is snatched then just snatch her back. Is it wrong? Fortunately, we have good bait here."

"…Bait?"

Not knowing what it meant, Hiyama dubiously tilted his head which made that person grinned and nodded.

"That's right, bait. Even if she puts priority on her feelings and parts from those comrades of hers… her best friends that were always by her side, her childhood friends… do you think she can just leave them be? Especially if she knows they are in a predicament."

"You…"

"It is easy to call her back. So, there's no need to be pessimistic about it. Especially in this case, even I got a chill… but I am glad that it resulted in something convenient for me. Yup, it could be said as a godsend. Shall we finish everything once we return to the Imperial Capital? Then… you will surely obtain what you desire, you know?"

"…"

Though knowing it was useless, Hiyama glared at his accomplice that stayed in the shadow. Even receiving his gaze, the person before Hiyama laughed normally.

Though he didn't know all of this person's plan, from their previous words, Hiyama could have guessed that it'd involve injuring the other classmates. For their own objective, they could easily betrayed their comrades, with whom they shared joy and sorrow with. Following that, a chill ran down in his spine as he couldn't feel any guilt from that person.

(A nasty person as always… but, I also cannot back down anymore… I must do it to get **my** Kaori back… that's all. There's nothing to hesitate about. This is for Kaori. I am the justice here.)

Hiyama only thought of himself and his confusion had already been disappeared. Because of his accomplice, he was made to look away from the thing he must see, believing that his action was justified, while it all stemmed from his desire for Kaori.

The silhouette turned silent as it understood Hiyama's feelings. Smiling, it waited for Hiyama's answer.

"… Okay. Just like before, I will lend you a hand. However…"

"Aah, I understand. I will obtain what I desired, and you will obtain yours. Give and take, isn't that a nice word? From now on is crucial. The case in the Imperial Capital too, can I leave that to you?"

Without minding Hiyama's distorted expression, that person turned on their heels and disappeared, as if merging with the space between the trees. Afterwards, what was left was the fallen boy whose eyes were filled with darkness.

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On the other hand, at the time the suspicious meeting happened in the outskirts of the town, another boy and girl were also standing under the moonlight.

They weren't in the location where the secret meeting happened, they were on a small, arched bridge, above one of the waterways that passed through between the shops and back alleys of the town. A lot of waterways were built for the large number of restaurants and service buildings, and the boy on the bridge was looking down on the flowing water's surface as it reflected the moon above it, under the moonlight.

More accurately, he wasn't looking but "drooping his head", moreover, his expression was dark, far from its usual shine. The boy's appearance was just like that a person whose company bankrupted, incurred large amount of debt, and was now despairing about his future as he looked far into the distance, into the twilight. It was our hero, Amanogawa Kouki.

"… Do you not want to talk?"

A voice called out to Kouki who didn't look away from the moon reflected on the water surface. It was his childhood friend for ten years, the pair of the girl that went away, Yaegashi Shizuku.

Unlike Kouki, Shizuku was entrusting her back to the bridge's railing, looking up at the moon in the sky. Towards the railing, her trademark ponytail was swaying, playing in the wind. Without looking at his childhood friend, and Shizuku who also not looking at him, Kouki replied as he continued to look at the moon.

"Is there something you want to say?"

"…"

There was no answer, no, Kouki just could not answer her. Even though he was looking at the moon reflected on the water's surface, what was in his mind was the spectacle of Kaori speaking her feelings. Within her anxiety and rejoice, as if praying, she spoke her feelings without any hint of a lie, which even convinced Kouki, whose denseness was at the level of a chronic disease.

Kouki and Kaori were friends for around ten years, but he was hurt when he saw her beautiful strength, he had never seen Kaori made such expressions. It was just like a bolt out of the blue for him.

Every time he recalled her expression, an unspeakable feeling sprang up in his mind. It was dark and heavy, a truly murky feeling. Unconditionally, without any basis, he believed his thought was a natural one. That was that, his childhood friend, Kaori, would always be by his side, without any change. It could be said he thought of Kaori as his. In other words, he was jealous.

That jealousy, Kouki himself didn't know as to whether it came from love or just his desire to monopolize her, but the feeling that she was "snatched" from him was swirling in his mind, intensely.

However, it was Kaori herself that decided to go along with the one who "snatched" her away, Hajime (though he would surely object to it). Moreover, he didn't want to believe and tried to deny the existence called Hajime by challenging him to a duel where he was defeated. His misery, resentment towards Hajime, doubts about Kaori's feelings, and a lot of other feelings were mixed together, making Kouki's mind a mess, just like the inside of kicked trash can.

Thus he kept looking at the water and unbeknownst to him, his other childhood friend was already standing beside him without saying anything… his reply from before was also truly not like him. Unable to find his next word, Kouki turned silent.

Sneaking a glance at such a Kouki, Shizuku frowned her brows and with an atmosphere that expressed "It can't be helped," she moved her mouth.

"… Right now, Kouki, you are being a pain."

"… A pain?"

Shizuku's unexpected reply made Kouki inadvertently parrot her. Shizuku moved her gaze from the moon towards Kouki, and continued her words.

"That's right. About Kaori, from the beginning she isn't yours, you know?"

"… That's… then, are you saying she is Nagumo's?"

Prick, Kouki's eyes were shaking as he guessed that, he desperately tried to object that as if cursing it. Hearing that, Shizuku answered with a strong forehead flick. "It hurt-!?," Kouki instinctively covered his forehead, and leering at him, Shizuku scolded him with a cold voice.

"Idiot. Kaori is her own. Whatever she chooses, wherever she goes, it is up to Kaori to decide that. Of course, even who she wants to be with… is up to her own decision."

"… Since when? Shizuku, you must have known that, right?"

Without asking "what do you mean," Shizuku nodded.

"You know… Kaori met Nagumo-kun in middle school… Well, he must have forgotten about it… Rather I also don't know in what kind of situation they met."

"…What's with that. Just what are you trying to say?"

"That is for you to ask Kaori yourself. After all, it is bad for me to say it without her permission."

"Then, the reason Kaori was always talking to Nagumo in class was truly… that is… because she loves… him?"

"Hmm, that's right."

"…"

Shizuku easily told him the truth he didn't want to hear, which made Kouki make a reproachful gaze. However, Shizuku only thought of it as a passing wind. Angered by her attitude, just like a child throwing a tantrum, Kouki began to spit out what was in his mind.

"… Why, why is it Nagumo. When we were still in Japan, he was an otaku, unmotivated, and he nothing special in terms of sports or studies either… always forcing his laugh, and being out of place… He took a noncommittal attitude whenever Kaori talked to him… he was an otaku… if it was me, I wouldn't treat Kaori coldly. I'd always think of her as important, and I would do my best for Kaori's sake… Besides, Nagumo was waited upon by those girls in such a manner, isn't he the lowest to treat them like that? Not only that, he is a murderer! He killed a non-resisting woman. So, do you think I was wrong!? That's right, it is strange for Kaori to like such a bastard after all. He surely must have *"SWISh!"* Guhah!?"

Heating up as he spoke, Kouki began to badmouth Hajime with fabricated truths which once again awarded him a forehead flick (No Beat ver.) from Shizuku. *What are you doing!?*, was conveyed by Kouki's glare which was ignored by Shizuku who was wearing an amazed expression.

"Again, your bad habit is coming out, you know? I've kept saying until now that you should stop interpreting things at your own convenience.

"Interpreting things to my convenience… there's no way—"

"Haven't you noticed it yet? Kouki, you don't know anything about Nagumo-kun, right? You don't know anything about the time we were still in Japan or in this world… and those girls looked happy, no, they really were happy, you see? But you ignored that fact and said something selfish… The current Kouki is only trying to make Hajime out to be a bad person who is unsuitable for Kaori. If that isn't called as interpreting things at your own convenience, then what is?"

"B-But… it is the true he killed a person."

"… At that time, even I was about to kill her. However, I couldn't muster my strength. Even in the future… if a similar thing happens, then I will surely swing my sword to kill, for the sake of surviving, for the sake of the people important to me. Though I don't know whether I can do it, since I will only know when the time comes… For now, the thing I did was only attempted murder… but, are you going to despise me if I become a murderer?"

Shizuku's confession made Kouki speechless. His childhood friend, Shizuku, held a stronger sense of responsibility and justice than others, so he suddenly felt like she was a distant existence after hearing she was truly going to kill. However, Kouki shook his head when he noticed the shadow of anxiety and the fear of injuring a person in Shizuku's bitter smile.

Seeing Kouki's reaction, Shizuku continued her words which could be called a soliloquy.

"Certainly, his transformation is surprising… and thinking about his character when we were still in Japan, it's not an exaggeration to say he's a different person… Well, even so, it looks like Kaori still thought of him as "Nagumo Hajime," and it looks like not all of him has changed… but one thing you must not forget, he fought that woman to save us and killed her in our stead."

"… Are you saying it is right to kill."

"I… I don't think it is right. A murder is a murder after all… I can neither justify it nor do I want to."

"Then…"

"Even so, we aren't qualified to criticize Nagumo-kun. It was no one's fault, but our own weakness…"

In short, he should solve it himself if he has a problem with it. It was simply that he was not strong enough, so he couldn't reach the result he hoped for. It was a mistake to complain about the result to the person he left everything with.

Noticing the unexpressed words, Kouki recalled that he could only crawl at the time Hajime displayed his peerlessness. Unable to object, he fell into sullen silence. His dissatisfied expression was obviously saying, "But, it is the truth that he killed a person!"

Towards Kouki's obstinacy, with an admonishing tone, Shizuku tacitly warned him about what had happened thus far, along with what she felt after coming to this world.

"I don't hate Kouki's straightforward sense of justice."

"… Shizuku."

"However. I think it's about time for you to start doubting whether you are actually in the right."

"Doubting my justice?"

"Certainly, a strong feeling is necessary to get things done. But, a distortion will surely appear if you don't doubt it and just keep moving on, blindly believing on it. That's why when that happens, I want you to react to it by wondering if you are really in the right, or whether you still need to do it "even" if you know it is wrong… it isn't bad if you continue to think like that, okay? … truthfully, it is difficult to keep on living rightfully. Having come to this world, I cut lives even though they were demonic beasts… I've come to think so."

Totally ignorant that Shizuku was thinking thus every time she killed a demonic beast, Kouki became pop-eyed.

"Kouki. You are not always the correct one and even if you are in the right. You should know that your rightfulness can become a lethal weapon. Well, the way you interpreted things at your convenience this time was not coming from your conviction of "justice," it was coming from your jealousy."

"N-no, for me to feel jealous…"

"It is uncool to make an excuse to deceive me here, you know?"

"…"

Kouki once again cast his gaze down, looking at the moon on the water surface. However, the dark mood from a while ago had weakened, and he seemed to be thinking deeply about something. Anyway, he had avoided rushing into a spiral of negativity, and Shizuku leaked out a relieved sigh, knowing that.

Thus, thinking it was necessary to leave him alone for now, Shizuku stopped leaning on the railing and tried to quietly leave the place. Then, Kouki's mutter came from behind Shizuku, who had already turned on her heels.

"Shizuku… you won't go anywhere, right?"

"… What's with this all of a sudden?"

"… Please don't go, Shizuku."

"…"

Kouki's words were as if he was petitioning her. It was a line that would made the female students in Japan and the girls of the Kingdom that fell for him go *kya kya*, but unfortunately, Shizuku only displayed an "amazed" expression. He might be weakened by the feeling of loss because Kaori had gone… Shizuku looked over her shoulder, towards the blurring moon. It was the moon that was on water surface which Kouki had been looking at previously.

"At the very least I am not like the "moon"… I won't just leave a man that is depending on me."

Saying thus, Shizuku left the place. Left behind, Kouki watched the alley where Shizuku disappeared for a while, then once again, he looked at the moon reflected on the water surface. Next, he noticed the meaning behind her words.

"… I see… the moon reflected on the water's surface."

Flowers reflected on a mirror and the moon reflected on the water's surface. Those were words speaking about a thing that could be seen but not be reached, visible but with no substance, just like a reflection. He unconsciously looked at the reflected moon as Kaori, and certainly it was not something he could reach. Especially after seeing Kaori's expression at the time she confessed her feelings to Hajime.

Shizuki said she was not "the moon reflected on the water's surface". So, it's possible for him to reach her. However, her next words were severe. Kouki inadvertently made a wry smile. He thought about what he had just said to his childhood friend.

Kouki stopped looking at the reflected moon, he looked up at the sky. He had unconditionally believed that he could reach "it" if he just stretched out his hand, but he realized "it" was awfully quite far. Letting out a deep sigh, Kouki began to think about the words coming from his strict and gentle childhood friend.

To change or not to change… it was up to Kouki.

Chapter 2 : Aiko's Disappearance

Prologue of fourth arc.

The event happened sometime later.

Three weeks had passed since the time Kouki's party had received shock from the reunion and the complex feelings because of to the separation in «Post Town, Hol-ad».

Currently, there was one thing Kouki's party must immediately deal with: to kill people. They wouldn't be able to fight anymore as long as it was not dealt with, so they returned to the Imperial Capital. It was necessary for them to experience "murder" if they wanted to participate in the war against the Demon race. They would only be liabilities in the war if they could not overcome it.

To begin with, they wouldn't be able to think about it properly since not much time remained. The event that occurred in Ul had already reached their ears. It was obvious the Demon race's movement had became more active since they themselves had also been attacked, and everyone could guess the war was drawing near. Therefore, as quickly as possible, Kouki's party wanted to overcome this problem by all means.

Currently, Kouki's party were doing battle practice against the Knights commanded by Meld. Ryuutarou, Kondou's party, and Hiyama's gang; those who were already prepared for it actually repeatedly asked themselves if they could really do it after seeing Hajime shoot the Demon race woman's head. There wasn't much time left, but they would be broken if they were forced to murder, so Meld and the Knights were also looking for a solution.

Towards the gloomy them, a small, good news had arrived.

It was the return of Aiko's party. Normally, Kouki's charisma would be able to pull the classmates together. However, the hero was depressed, which made everyone

depressed, too. The reason for them not to be broken from the severe defeat and the current problem was thanks to Suzu's mood making which followed by the prudent people such as Shizuku and Nagayama. Even so, their minds swallowed by uneasiness forced themselves to look more than welcoming to the adult they were familiar with and trusted. Everyone truly wanted to meet the teacher who always did her best for her students.

Hearing Aiko had returned, Shizuku made the first move. Shizuku wanted to consult AIko about various things, so she rounded up her training. She also wanted to hear the impression of the classmates who met Hajime much earlier than her, and she wanted to exchange information objectively with Aiko who neither assume nor prejudices.

Wearing the jet-black sheath she received from Hajime and belt for another jet-black, double-edged sword, Shizuku walked through the passage in royal palace. Her appearance somehow made more noble ladies and maids blush comparable to other men. It was a problem that haunted Shizuku even in this different world. She really wanted to be spared from being called "Onee-sama" by the women who were older than her.

Having heard the things Hajime did in Ul, Shizuku wanted to directly asked Aiko as to what she thought of Hajime. Depending on Aiko's impression of Hajime, Kouki's currently balanced mind would possibly leaned towards undesirable point. It was Shizuku's nature that burdened her with hardship wherever she goes.

"Surely, there was also a mess when they were in Ul… but he also gave me this katana-like sword… Seriously, what's with "sturdy and able to cut anything nicely." Isn't it an artifact at a level of a national treasure."

Talking to herself, Shizuku silently moved her hand onto the Katana hanging on her waist. Walking towards Aiko's room, Shizuku recalled the time she visited the Kingdom's smithy for the sake of her katana's maintenance.

Shizuku called her katana simply as a black katana and shown it to the Kingdom's best blacksmith. At first, the blacksmith were formal before her as one of "God's Apostles." However, his attitude completely changed as soon as he examined the black katana with appraisal magic, and he asked Shizuku while grabbing her shoulders. Thus, as if his previous attitude was just a lie, he barraged her with questions, no he interrogated her with words, such as where did she obtained it and who was the creator.

Although she was dumbfounded, Shizuku somehow managed to regain her calm and asked what happened. The blacksmith said that even within the Kingdom's treasury, this sword should be more or less at the same as Holy Sword. Although its

output and capacity for receiving magic power didn't reach Holy Sword, it's functionality and minute details as a weapon were above Holy Sword.

Next, detailed examination found that if it was supplied with magic power, the blade would be extended by 60 centimeters in form of wind blade. Furthermore, two more blades would form beside the extended part, and they could be fired.

Then, the sheath was examined. It was understood that the sheath would be cladded in thunder if it was supplied with magic power and there was a switch-like part on the sheath's mouth that would shoot needles with tremendous force.

The blade part was made of azanthium so it wouldn't be chipped and there was almost no need to undergo maintenance. The maintenance was only to replenish the needle if it was used.

However, there was a problem, it didn't have magic array to supply it with magic power. It was a natural thing. Hajime was capable of directly manipulating magic power and he was originally never thought of giving it to anyone. So, it wasn't a mistake when he said "sturdy and able to cut things nicely" if it was used by Shizuku.

Those were the only functions installed, and the mysterious black sword (or so the blacksmiths had seen it as) could only be used by manipulating magic power **directly**, made the Kingdom's blacksmiths burn with fighting spirit.

'Even though we can't make a weapon with such minute details and functionality, we will make this sword usable!' was what they thought. In short, they would somehow make the user's magic power supply into the sword by any means. Resultantly, after three days and nights, the blacksmiths, with the best one as the core, set aside all of their other works and somehow succeeded in creating the magic array.

As such, Shizuku would be able to pull the black katana's abilities without using a chant. Afterwards, the blacksmiths whose magic power was dried up were slept for several days with truly happy expressions.

Shizuku was looking in the distance as she recalled the terrific craftsmanship spirit, then she arrived at her destination, Aiko's room. She knocked, but there was no response. She heard Aiko was going to report to the King and the other officials, so Shizuku thought she must have not return. Leaning against the wall, Shizuku decided to wait for Aiko's return.

Thirty minutes had passed until Aiko returned. Her footsteps could be heard from the inner corridor which somehow sounded depressed. Aiko was walking without

looking ahead, and her serious expression made Shizuku understandd Aiko was desperately thinking about something in her head.

Thus, Aiko didn't even notice her room with Shizuku right beside its door and passed them. While wondering what had happened, Shizuku called Aiko to stop.

"Sensei… Sensei!"

"Hoeh!?"

Raising a silly voice, her body twitched in surprise. Aiko looked around and finally noticed Shizuku. Afterwards, Aiko sighed in relief seeing Shizuku's healthy look, then she smiled in joy.

"Yaegashi-san! Long time no see. Have you been healthy? Are you unhurt? Are the others safe?"

Even though she had been depressed up until now, the things she said were only her worries about her students. Towards the unchanging Ai-chan sensei, joy also entered Shizuku's gaze as she smiled, and sense of security filled her mind. For a while, the two were happy for each other's safety and their reunion, then they entered Aiko's room for consultation and exchanging information.

* * *

"So that's what happened… Shimizu-kun was…"

Shizuku and Aiko were alone in the room, and they mutually exchanged information as they drank the tea inside the tea cups with cute, cat-like legs. Hearing the things happened in Ul, those words were Shizuku's response.

Inside the room, an awkward mood hung in the air. Aiko dejectedly drooped her shoulders; she was obviously depressed about Shimizu. Thinking about Aiko's personality and sense of responsibility, Shizuku could not help worry no matter what the circumstance was, but she could not find the words needed to be said.

However, although Shizuku was reluctant to let Aiko continue being depress, so as cheerful as possible, she rejoiced about Aiko's safety.

"I feel bad about Shimizu-kun… however, I truly am glad that Sensei is alive. I really want to thank Nagumo-kun."

Towards the smiling Shizuku, Aiko was reflecting because she once again made her student worry about her, then she returned a smile.

"I see. At our reunion, he didn't have any interest in us and this world… but he came to save Yaegashi-san and the others. Furthermore, he even protected a small child… Fufu, it is possible that some part of the past him had come back. Or should I say he is growing up as he change… he has become reliable."

Saying so as she looked at the far distance, somehow Aiko's cheeks were… slightly dyed in red. Shizuku was confused while thinking, *Isn't that a strange reaction for just remembering one of her student?* She watched as she Aiko sometimes laughed while reminiscing, "Fufu."

Noticing Shizuku's gaze, *Cough!*, Aiko cleared her throat. However, she was unable to smooth things over, her cheeks convulsed, and she gained a bad premonition. Shizuku decided to press on. While half persuading herself that it couldn't be possible, Shizuku said,

"… Sensei? From our talk, Sensei said he saved you from a dangerous situation, can you tell me the details?"

"Eh!?"

"Well, it was said Sensei might have died, so I want to hear how did you recovered from that…"

"A-About that…"

Shizuku recalled the special medicine that quickly healed the near-dead Meld, she thought it must be that, so she played the fool and asked Aiko. Aiko's cheeks began to turn redder than before. Aiko's gaze was swam around and hesitatingly, she muttered her words… it was indeed suspicious.

Like a swordsman she was, Shizuku cut to the case.

"… Sensei. Did something happened between you and… Nagumo-kun?"

" !? Th-There's no way anything happened, you know? J-Just what are you trying to say? It was just the usual me as a teacher and him as a student!"

"Sensei. Please calm down. Your expression had turned strange."

"!"

Aiko was truly shaken. Frantically, Aiko muttered, "I am a teacher, I am a teacher…" Aiko must have thought she was muttering in her mind, but she wasn't. Thus, Shizuku was convinced. Although Shizuku didn't understand in what stage it was,

Aiko began to hold a special feeling towards Hajime different from the other students!

"Nagumo-kun! As a person! What did you do to Ai-chan!?"

Already, anyone could see Shizuku's cheek was convulsing while she was thinking so. Hajime had already became a flag raiser whose level couldn't even be compared to Kouki. Though unlike Kouki, Hajime wasn't dense towards affections from others and he had answered to it clearly… and he must had told that to Aiko, too.

Her best friend's rival appearing in an unexpected place made Shizuku looked at the ceiling with her hand covering her convulsing cheek. Regardless of gender, Shizuku had come to hate that side of Hajime, and a dangerous idea of seriously spreading a painful nickname had crossed her mind… which she managed to give up.

Aiko and Shizuku tried to smooth things over by repeatedly clearing their throats, then they continued their previous conversation as if nothing had happened.

"Then, Sensei. Did something happen when you reported to the king? After all, it seemed to have been a serious talk."

Shizuku's question made Aiko recall something and she made a bitter expression where anger and distrust mixed.

"… Officially, Nagumo-kun is branded as a heretic."

"!? That's—!… What do you mean? No, I somehow can guess it… but isn't that decision a hasty one?"

Hajime was powerful. With only several people, he repulsed more than 60,000 demonic beasts while using mysterious artifacts. Hajime's comrades also possessed unbelievable power. However, his stance was he would not cooperate with Church of the Saints and would even oppose them depending on the situation. It was true Hajime was a truly dangerous existence for the Kingdom and the Church of the Saints.

However, it was truly too hasty to brand him as a heretic so quickly. The brand of a heretic was given to those who disobeyed the teaching from Church of the Saints and became the God's enemy, and such branding would make it legal for anyone to subjugate Hajime any time, any where. And according to the situation, even the Temple Knights and Kingdom's army might move out.

Following that, by attacking Hajime because he was a heretic, they would receive the treatment of an enemy from Hajime, his merciless and severe attack. There was no

way the King and Church people didn't know the danger. However, Aiko said they decided it right away. There was no way Shizuku would not be surprised by that.

Shizuku had guessed up until that point, which made Aiko nod in admiration towards the unchanging fast-learner.

"It is completely as Yaegashi-san said. Moreover, no matter if he has tremendous power and not following the church, he ended up saving Ul, but they ignored my protests. Nagumo-kun had expected this situation, so he bolstered by title "Goddess of Bountiful Harvest." Also, I heard from the bodyguards that the name "Goddess of Bountiful Harvest" and "Goddess Sword" had spread further into the other towns. So, by branding him as heretic, it is also means the church is denying "Goddess of Bountiful Harvest" who saved the people. Thus, they shouldn't be able to easily ignore my protest, or so it should be. But those people forced the decision. They were obviously being odd… also, I recalled that other than Ishtal and church's people, the king and other royalties' appearances were strange…"

"… That's troubling. Just what are they thinking… But the thing they couldn't help and think of now is "who" they should send to the powerful Nagumo-kun, right? And that's the point here."

"… It is so. Perhaps…"

"Eeh. There's only us… but I will absolutely refuse that, you know? I don't want to die. If I become Nagumo-kun's enemy… I don't even want to imagine it."

Shizuku shivered, and Aiko made a wry smile understanding what Shizuku felt.

Thus, before the Kingdom and Church told Kouki and the others to fight Hajime, Aiko decided to tell them about the things Hajime told her. About the Mad Gods and his purpose during his travels. She held no proof, so she didn't know whether Kouki and the others would believe it. Furthermore, up until now they did their best because they believed the God would return them to their original world as long as they won the war against Demon race.

In truth, the God takes delight in people's reaction to His doing, and the possibility of returning is extremely low. So let's look for the dwelling of those who rebelled against the gods in the old times and look for a way to return ourselves! No one would believe it if those words were said all of a sudden. After Kouki and the others heard what she told them, whether they would see it as nonsense and continued to fight like before, or believed her and looked for another way… That was not something Aiko could predict. However, she must nail it to them not to blindly believing the Church. Aiko convinced herself to do that now.

"Yaegashi-san. Nagumo-kun knows his information is an unbelievable one and will be antagonized by Amanokawa and the others, so he said this only to me."

"Information… is it?"

"Yes. It is about the God worshipped by the church and the objective of Nagumo and the girls' travel. He didn't give any proof about it… but it is a truly important information, so tonight… no, this evening, I want to tell this to everyone."

"That's… no, I understand. Then, should I call everyone now?"

"No, it is an information I don't want to be known by the church's side, so I want to tell it at a time when everyone has gathered naturally; at dinner. And we should be able to talk among ourselves if I said I want to spend time with the students I haven't seen for a long time without any outsiders."

"Indeed… I understood. Then, at dinner it is."

Afterwards, a good amount of time had passed while Shizuku and Aiko chatted. However, they couldn't have known that the promise for the dinner could not come to pass…

* * *

The time was evening.

While the sun was setting, it gave a parting gift of vivid orange color, and Aiko was walking along the empty corridor. The evening sunlight entered the corridor from the windows and drew an obvious contrast on the wall and floor at the other sides.

Aiko went towards the dining room while her gaze was captivated by the evening sun, but she immediately stopped after she felt someone's presence. When she looked forward, she saw a woman-like figure inside the shadow. The woman walked in the middle of the corridor, and gracefully stopped her feet with a straight stature. Her clothing was the nun's habit of Church of the Saints.

The woman was beautiful, however she spoke to Aiko with a somewhat mechanical and cold voice.

"Nice to meet you, Hatayama Aiko. I've come for you."

Aiko felt a chill ran down her spine when she heard her voice, but she feigned her calmness as to not become impolite to someone she met for the first time.

"Umm, nice to meet you, too. Coming for me… you mean the dinner with the students?"

"No, your destination is the main church."

"Eh?"

The sentence which didn't give her a chance to answer, made Aiko inadvertently ask her again. At that time, the woman moved out from the shadow into a place lighted by the evening sun. Seeing the woman, Aiko held her breath. Even Aiko, who was the same gender as her, was instinctively charmed by the woman's beauty.

Her silver hair was sparkling while it was being reflected by the evening sunlight. With big, long and narrow blue eyes, and her mysterious and wonderful features that seemed to be both of an adult woman and a young girl; all of her parts were perfectly positioned. Her height was tall for a woman, around 170 centimeters, which forced Aiko to look up at her. Her white skin was as smooth as a white porcelain, her hands and feets were slender. Her breasts neither big nor small, it was a truly exquisite size if one was thinking about the balance of her entirety.

However, she was regrettably had no expression. Rather than expressionless, it was as if she wore a Noh mask. No one would doubt if it was said she was a statue — the best masterpiece by a famous sculptor. The woman possessed an inhumanely artistic beauty.

Towards Aiko, who held her breath, the woman smiled and indifferently continued her words.

"We feel the thing you are going to tell them will inconvenient us. After all, what your students will be doing now looks "interesting" to us. That's why, until the time come, you will temporarily leave the stage."

"Wh-What are you…"

The beautiful nun slowly approached Aiko without even making a footstep, and Aiko instinctively backed. Then, Aiko saw the nun's blue eyes shone. Aiko felt her mind grow hazy. Immediately, she concentrated as though she was going to invoke magic, and her haziness dispersed in a snap.

"… I see. As expected, I can only disregard that you are calling yourself a "God." For you are capable of resisting my "charm". There's no other way. I will just take you by force."

"D-Don't come! Wh-What I want—… ugh!?"

The pressure from the woman's true character made Aiko immediately tried to activate her magic. However, faster than her finishing the chant, the nun momentarily shortened their distance and drove her fist into Aiko's stomach. Aiko collapsed, and at the time she felt her consciousness about to be swallowed by darkness, she heard the nun's mutter.

"Don't worry. I won't kill you. You are an excellent piece, and you might be useful against that irregular."

The white-haired, eye-patched boy floated inside Aiko's mind. Following that, while knowing it wouldn't reach him, she shouted his name in her mind right before her consciousness completely disappeared.

———— *Nagumo-kun!*

* * *

"?"

The nun easily shouldered Aiko as though she was weightless, then she looked around the corridor as if she had sensed someone. For a while, the nun silently searched for something. Then, she slowly opened the guest room's door along the corridor.

Following that, she entered the room, looked around, approached the closet without any sound of a footstep, and she forcefully opened the door. However, there was nothing inside, so the nun tilted her head and looked around once again, looking here and there. Before long, after not finding anything, she shouldered Aiko again and went outside of the room.

With silence returning into the room, a trembling murmur could be heard.

"… I must tell this… someone—"

No one was inside the room. However, retreating footsteps could be heard, and before long, the room completely regained its silence.

Chapter 3 : Immediate Trouble in the Great Desert

A brown world.

«Guryuu-en Great Desert» was a place those words expressed, perfectly. The sand was brown, formed by millions of miniscule grains. The wind that was blowing constantly threw up the sand and dyed the air brown, and in a 360 degree radius, there was only one color as far as one's eye could reach.

Moreover, there were numerous sand dunes, big and small, whose surfaces were always stirred by the wind. Moment by moment, the surface's pattern of the dune was constantly changing, as if expressing "I am alive." The blazing sun and its unreserved heat made the temperature of the sand on the ground shoot up quickly. It easily exceeded 40 degrees celsius. Coupled with the fluttering sand, it was the worst environment to travel in.

However, it was only for "ordinary" travelers.

Currently, inside such a severe environment, a black, box-shaped vehicle, a magic-driven four-wheeler in fact, was advancing casually while raising a dust storm. Though there was neither road or pathway, it was solved by the compass installed inside the vehicle.

"… The outside is amazing… I am really glad that this is not a normal carriage."

"This one agrees. This one doth not know how it became such an environment… but indeed it isn't a place this one wants to be actively moving in."

Sitting on the rear seat while watching the sand battering the window and observing the brown-colored world, Shia and Tio muttered so, wholeheartedly. No matter how much of an M Tio was, this environment only depressed her.

"It's completely different from when Myuu came here before! Here's very cool, and Myuu's eyes aren't hurting! Papa is amazing!"

"That's right~. Hajime-papa is amazing, right~. Myuu-chan, do you want to drink cold water?"

"Want to~. Kaori-oneechan, thank you~."

Sitting on the lap of Kaori, who was seated on the window side of the front seat, Myuu was excited because it was different from the time that she was here when she was kidnapped before. Myuu was looking at Hajime, who created such a comfortable space, with sparkling eyes.

That was natural. It would have been terribly severe for Myuu, who was a member of sea-dweller tribe, to cross the desert. For a young child around four years old like her, it would not be strange for her to have died due in her weakened state. Having

endured such an environment made Myuu's surprise further increase at the gap between that time and now. After all, this four-wheeler was equipped with air conditioning.

Following that, the one who agreed with Myuu, took out cold water which normally didn't exist in the desert even if one hoped with all their might, was the one who made an impactful confession to Hajime and declaration of war to Yue in Hol-ad, and, before he knew it, she had become one of his companions. She was Kaori. Incidentally, the water was taken out of the refrigerator installed in the car.

"You know, Shirasa-… Kaori. Please stop saying Hajime-papa. It is somehow made me felt terribly itchy over here."

"? But, isn't Myuu said that as if it was the norm?"

"Well, I don't mind Myuu. However, for a classmate to call me papa is really…"

Due to her personality which liked to look after others, Kaori somehow became the one who took care of Myuu and she mostly called Hajime as Hajime-papa when she was by Myuu's side. And for a classmate, and a girl at that, to call him papa, Hajime felt a different sense of resistance from when Myuu called him that, and he wore a truly subtle expression.

Incidentally, for Hajime to call her as "Kaori" was a result of her petition. Her reason was, *Hajime-kun calls everyone by their own given name, so it is unfair for me to be called by my family name!*, something like that.

"Is that so? Then I won't… but, someday when I also have a child… at that time…"

Kaori said so with her cheeks dyed crimson, while sneaking a peek at Hajime. Thus a strange atmosphere wrapped everyone inside the vehicle, except for Myuu. Then Yue answered Kaori in place of Hajime who pretended not to hear anything.

"…Unfortunately, I have made that appointment already. Hajime promised it to me."

"!? … Hajime-kun, what does she mean?"

"… I don't think it is something that strange. After all, it is something still in the far future."

"… fufu, Hajime already promised to introduce me to his parents."

" !?"

"…He's thoroughly made a bright family plan."

" !?"

"…Even the dates in Hajime's hometown."

" !?"

Yue's vigorous attacks couldn't be stopped! Those words, one by one, became stakes, driven into Kaori's chest. However, Kaori wasn't a woman that would be done so easily. She believed in Hajime's survival even in such a despairing situation and she held the courage to challenge Yue, who obviously owned a special bond with Hajime. In the moment Yue's words were stopped, she began her counterattack!

"I, I know a lot of things about Hajime-kun that Yue doesn't know! For example, Hajime's dream for the future, his hobbies, even his favorite genre! Does Yue know the anime and manga that Hajime-kun likes?"

"Hmph… that's… but, those aren't related to the current us. There are no such things here. Hajime can just teach me once we arrive in Japan…"

"How naive. Just look at the current Hajime-kun. Doesn't he looked like an anime character?"

"Geh!?"

It should've been a fight between Kaori and Yue but somehow Hajime received the damage.

"White-haired with an eyepatch, moreover his magic eyes… those are certainly the things Hajime-kun's favorite characters have… even his weapon, that Cross Bit is modeled from funnel… ah, but the one Hajime-kun likes is 00, so is it GN Bit? Whatever it is, the current Hajime-kun is still quite the otaku."

"GAH!? K-Kaori…"

"Mu, muu… for Hajime's weapon to be derived from that."

"Yue, can you say it is your victory if you don't know the things the one you love likes?"

"… Kaori… that's some courage… then, let me teach you myself. About the things that Hajime likes on…the bed."

" !? … W-, w-, w-, on bed, uu~, as I thought…"

"Fufufu… it is good that you now know the difference between us."

During their travel, Yue and Kaori had already made so many sparks against each other that the other party members already came to ignore them. In the beginning, Shia watched them anxiously, but in the end, it didn't become a serious problem, so she stopped getting herself involved with them.

In a way, it was Hajime who received most of the damage. Hajime was the source of the two's quarrel, so the content of their fights made him want to writhe. Even now, he received mental damage because the things he worried about the most were being pointed at.

Now Yue boldly told them about the "night" activities which made Kaori close her ears, not wanting to hear it. Hajime himself didn't want Myuu to be exposed to that, so he tried to stop Yue.

However, faster than Hajime, Myuu unexpectedly came to stop the two's quarrel.

"… u~, Yue-oneechan and Kaori-oneechan always quarrelling! Myuu hates it if big sisters don't get along!"

Saying so, Myuu moved from Kaori's laps towards Shia's lap in the back seat. Moreover, Yue and Kaori became flustered. It was because the four year-old girl said she would hate them.

"Geez, you two are unbecoming in front of Myuu-chan. Rather, that was bad for her education. I also understand how much you two think of Hajime-san, but please be more prudent."

"! …What a failure. To be scolded by Shia…"

"I-I am sorry, Myuu-chan, Shia."

To be admonished by Shia made the two droop their shoulders.

For Yue, Shia was akin to a friend and younger sister, and although Shia also held affection towards Hajime, Shia also thought similarly towards Yue which made Yue didn't think of her as a love rival. As for Tio, she was just a pervert. That's why, Kaori, who made a full-frontal declaration of war towards Yue, was the first love rival she ever had.

Yue was convinced that there was an absolute bond between her and Hajime. She held an unwavering confidence that she was Hajime's "special person." That's why she was confident that she would be able to easily defeat the challenger, Kaori, when the confession and declaration of war happened.

However, although her confidence didn't change, Kaori sometimes made the flowers bloom between her and Hajime when they were reminiscencing about Japan, which was unknown to Yue and the others. Towards Kaori, who knew the past Hajime that she didn't know of, Yue's sense of rivalry budded before long.

As a result, just like children boasting about their collections, their quarrel turned from a serious one into such a situation and today, Myuu and Shia finally got angry at them.

Normally, Hajime was the one who should be stopping Yue, but he was the one who received most of the damage from the two' quarrels. And now, he could only look far into the distance, as if it didn't have anything to do with him, to heal his wounded heart.

"Nn? What is that? Master, there seems to be a commotion in the direction at three o'clock."

Yue and Kaori were desperately appealing that they were getting along to mend Myuu's mood and Shia was also calming Myuu with a wry smile. Hajime muttered, "I am not a chuuni" with hollow eyes. While those happened, unexpectedly, Tio who watched them in interest called out to Hajime. She seemed to have discovered something outside the window.

Hajime looked towards the place Tio mentioned, a big dune at his right. There, numerous worm-like demonic beasts, sandworms to be precise, had gathered. Their numerous heads could be seen at the top of the dune.

Those sandworms were 20 meters on average, large-scale demonic beasts while the largest ones were around 100 meters in length. They lived in this «Guryuu-en Great Desert» and would usually submerge themselves underground and attack prey in their vicinity by opening their big, fangs filled mouths from below. They specialized in surprise attacks due to being hard to detect and were feared by people who crossed the large desert as the gods of death.

Fortunately, the sandworms themselves weren't very perceptive, so as long as one wasn't so unfortunate as to come near them by accident, they would neither notice nor aim at anyone who was far away. As such, it could be said that there was someone who was not that fortunate at that dune, but…

"? Why are they just squirming around?"

That's right, Tio would have not made a doubtful face and asked Hajime if there were just sandworms appearing. With Hajime's perception skills, he would have noticed any of the sandworms' surprise attacks, and they'd be able to get out of the

sandworm's range with four-wheeler's speed. What was abnormal was that if the sandworms were attacking someone, rather than attacking, the sandworms were squirming around in their surroundings.

"It's as if, they art confused as to eat or not, right?"

"Well, from what I see, isn't that so?"

"This one hath no knowledge of this place. But those art all-eaters, they shouldn't be hesitating to eat anything…"

Although Tio was a masochist pervert, she had lived far longer than Yue and unlike the imprisoned Yue, her knowledge was pretty vast. That was why she owned reliable information about demonic beasts. For her to be looking doubtful must mean that something extraordinary is happening.

However, they didn't have any reason to be involved with it. Hajime decided to get as far away as possible without confirming or getting involved in it.

And at that time,

"Kh!? Everyone, brace yourselves!"

Hajime shouted so and immediately accelerated the four-wheeler. Morrow, from behind the four-wheeler, starting with a small part of its body surfacing, a gigantic figure with the same color as the desert jumped out. With its mouth open, it was a sandworm. Apparently, Hajime's party were also unfortunate ones.

Hajime further steered to the left and right, advancing through the sand at high speed. Under the four-wheeler that drew an "S" letter, a second and third sandworm jumped out.

"Kyaaaa!"

"Hiu!"

"Wawawa!"

In order of screams, there was Kaori, Myuu, and Shia. Met with a strong centrifugal force, Kaori turned behind, worrying about Myuu in the back seat. But her balance crumbled and she fell into Hajime's lap with her hip on Yue's lap.

Blinking her eyes, Kaori's cheeks were flushed, and as she was, she clung tightly to Hajime's waist. Her position was actually pretty bad. It made Hajime's cheek cramp. Incidentally, the other half of Kaori's body was crushing on Yue.

"Oi, Shira-… Kaori! What are you doing in such a situation!"

"It's a dangerous! A dangerous situation! So, I'm just clinging to Hajime-kun!"

"…Damn you, Kaori. To pin me under, is it… a surprise attack?"

While receiving an ambush from the sandworms, Kaori used this chance to hug Hajime. Yue was slapping Kaori's butt even now, but the blushing Kaori was still clinging to Hajime's waist, not moving at all.

While they were like that, the three appearing sandworms, with their upper bodies out of the ground, were glaring at the four-wheeler that evaded all of their ambushes. This time, those gigantic figures came forward to attack from overhead.

If it was a normal carriage, everything would've ended with that attack. However, it was an artifact created with a portion of Hajime's otaku soul. It wasn't even daunted at being made out as prey.

Besides…

"Ah, this is the first time I am using THIS!"

Saying so, Hajime turned around the four-wheeler with a drift, advancing backwards, he poured his magic and activated the installed function.

CLANK! KA-THUNK! KA-THUNK!

At the same time the mechanical sound effect rang out, a part of the four-wheeler's bonnet slided open and an arm with a set of four rockets came out. The arm moved as if looking for its' prey and when it turned towards the incoming sandworms, *wooosh!*, such an sfx rang out accompanied by the deadly warheads scattering their sparks.

Shining in an orange color, the rockets entered right into the sandworms' opened mouths and after a moment, they created great explosions as they destroyed the sandworms from the inside. The sandworms' crimson blood and flesh poured down like a shower and some stuck on the windshield of the currently back running four-wheeler.

"Uhee… Shia, don't let Myuu see it."

"I did that already~. Anh! Myuu-chan, was it painful? But please hold on for a while."

Hajime asked Shia to do so at the time the rockets were fired into the incoming sandworms because the stimulation might be too strong for Myuu. Like that, in

synchronization with Hajime, Shia was already embracing Myuu closely to her chest so as she would not see it. However, maybe because she could not breath from her face being buried in Shia's breasts, Myuu tried to sip out and inadvertently touched a part of Shia's body. Inadvertently, Shia moaned. Hajime decided that he did not hear anything.

Currently, although Kaori was clinging onto Hajime's waist, Yue was finally able to fix her seatbelt. Indeed it was not a situation where he could be defeated by his own impulse, even though his ears were dyed in red with his face cramped.

"E-Excuse me, Hajime-kun. I am sorry. That, that I impulsively… there's no perverted meaning to it. That is, for a bit, I just wanted to hug…"

"… then if things go well, are you going to satisfy Hajime like that?"

"Un, that is so… wait, no! Yue, don't put such strange things into my mouth. I am not as lewd as Yue."

"…You said I am lewd… certainly, I can't refute that when I am alone with Hajime."

"…Girls, please shut it already. Also, Yue, please don't talk about night activities because it's embarrassing."

With the three sandworms crushed by the rockets installed in the four-wheeler, Hajime sharpened his gaze because the sandworms on the dune before could be seen moving due to perceiving the explosive sound and impact.

However, on his side, Kaori and Yue were conversing just as usual which reduced his tension. Inadvertently, he admonished them due to him being embarrassed.

To begin with, in his mind, the "night" Yue was certainly a lewd one and, when he was alone with her, he thought of her as pretty erotic. Kaori who seemed to have seen through him was teary eyed. Yue, with a bewitching smile, was looking at Hajime while licking her lip. Kaori, who saw that, raised a cute groan. Unconsciously, her fighting spirit blazed further.

From the back seat, Shia said, "I understand your feelings, Kaori-san. We are comrades here," while patting Kaori's shoulder with sympathetic eyes.

Hajime ignored them and the moved four-wheeler above another dune. He could see the group of sandworms on the lower side of the ground with their lower parts still underground. They didn't hide anything as they slightly raised the sand. They might have guessed that they had been noticed by Hajime's party, so they chose speed over another surprise attack.

Hajime put the rocket launcher away and activated another piece of weaponry in its stead. The center of the bonnet slid apart and a rectangular machine appeared from inside. Following that, the rectangular box extended its barrel with kashun! sound effect, and it became a rifle was similar to Schlagen.

Next, bright red sparks gushed out from the four-wheeler's Schlagen. With its arm adjusting the angle, *DUuuoo!!*, came a roaring, firing sound as a line flashing line tore through the brown world.

The bullet, which was fired at a high-velocity, advanced as it raised the sand on the ground upon impact and grandly raised a dust storm. On the sand column that was raised just like an eruption was, of course, a lot of sand colored meat and red blood.

The Schlagen installed on four-wheeler continued to fire bright red flashes, one after another. The sandworms that were hunting their prey exploded on the ground and became small bits of nourishment for the barren ground.

"Hajime-kun! Look at that!"

"…A white person?"

When four-wheeler's Schlagen, which was trailing white smoke, was stored back, Kaori let out a surprised voice and pointed her finger. In the place Kaori pointed at, just as Yue muttered, was a collapsed person who was wrapped in white clothing. It was probably the one the previous sandworms were looking at. However, from their distance, it was unknown as to why it wasn't eaten.

"Please, Hajime-kun. Let's go there… I am a "healer" after all."

Kaori looked at Hajime, petitioning. Even Hajime was interested as to why that person was not attacked by the demonic beasts of the desert in such a situation, so he accepted Kaori's request. It was possible that the person carried a method or item capable of keeping demonic beasts away. And in actuality, there was a mineral called the Faeadren crystal that carried such an effect in the sea of trees. The crystal only made it difficult for demonic beasts to approach, but there's a possibility that even stronger items exist.

As such, the four-wheeler came near the collapsed person. The person wore clothing that was similar to galabeya (egyptian clothing), and it wore a hood that was large enough to hide its' face. Its' face couldn't be seen. Falling prone, the hood hid it.

Getting off the four-wheeler, Kaori ran with short steps towards the fallen person.

"!… This is…"

When the hood was taken off, a man's face could be seen, a young one that was still in the middle of his 20s. However, what surprised Kaori was not that but the young man's state. With a pained expression, he was drenched in sweat, his breathing was rough, and his pulse was fast. He generated an intense heat from all over his body that could be felt even through his clothing. Moreover, blood vessels could be seen as if they were being pressed from the inside of his body, and he was bleeding from his eyes and nose. It was obviously an abnormal situation. It was neither a sun stroke nor cold.

Hajime became cautious towards the virus-carrier like young man, but he decided to keep quiet and watch as the healing specialist was examining him. Kaori activated "Infiltrate and Examine." Using magic power to infiltrate the other's body, she could examine one's state and the result could be seen on her status plate.

With one hand placed on the young man's chest, Kaori's other hand was holding her status plate where the result of the examination was displayed. The result was…

"…Rampaging magic power? Does it mean the magic power inside his body is out of control because of poison?"

"Kaori? Do you understood anything now?"

"Y-Yeah, but this is…"

Saying so, Kaori shown what was displayed on her status plate,

Condition	Excessive release of magic power, unable to release it outside.
Symptom	Fever, hazy consciousness, pain in whole body, rupturing of blood vessels and hemorrhage
Cause	Abnormality in bodily fluid.

"It is just my guess, but he must have drunk something which resulted in his magic power going out of control… moreover, because he can't release it outside, his magic power was pressuring from inside his body and his body couldn't endure it… if this keeps up, his internal organs and blood vessels will explode. It is also possible that he will be weakened to death due to a large amount of hemorrhaging… I am requesting a blessing unto this location, "Ten Thousand Heavens."

Concluding so, Kaori chanted her healing magic. "Ten Thousand Heavens" was what she activated. It was onne of the middle-ranked healing magics with the effect of curing abnormal conditions. It was the magic used to undo Suzu's petrification.

However…

"…There's almost no change… why? For it to be incapable of curing it… does it means too much time has passed?"

Apparently, "Ten Thousand Heavens" could not cure the man, it could only delay the progression. Next, maybe because of the pressure from inside his body, the young man groaned in pain. His bleeding didn't stop. At the moment, because she didn't have any clear treatment method, Kaori ground her teeth and decided to use her emergency measure.

"Here I declared the light of grace, here is my realm, my sanctuary, which crushes all evils just as I intended to, "Holy Ground.""

High-ranked light attributed healing magic, "Holy Ground." It was a magic that transfers peoples' magic power to the others within the area. Basically, by transferring one's magic power to one's companion, that person would temporarily escaped from magic power exhaustion. It was a magic that aimed to supplement another if s/he didn't have a sufficient amount of magic power to shoot a strong magic.

Moreover, it wasn't limited to the user's magic power, so it could forcefully transfer someone else's magic power to another within the area. It held the same principle as magic drain. However, it needed a lot more time to extract the magic power from another person and it was impossible to extract a lot of it at once. This was the reason it is only a "High-ranked magic."

To begin with, it only became practical because Kaori was capable of activating magic which originally needed ten notes with only three notes of chanting. It showed how capable Kaori was.

The reason she used this magic on the suffering young man was of course to release the rampaging magic power that was building pressure inside his body towards the outside. It was displayed on the status plate that the young man was in state where he "cannot release magic power to outside of the body," so she decided to try "if" it could be solved by forcefully draining it using high-ranked magic.

The pure-white light expanded from the center of the young man's body, and firefly-like, fleeting lights sprang about. It was a mysterious sight. With her eyes shut, the appearance of Kaori, who placed her hand on the young man's chest as she concentrated and was wrapped by the fleeting light, was divine.

Kaori, who easily activated high-ranked magic, made the ones well versed in magic, Yue and Tio, inadvertently leak "Hou…," voices of admiration. While being held by Shia, Myuu watched Kaori in an entranced expression and muttered, "Beautiful…"

Without noticing that her new comrades in the surroundings were raising voices of admiration, Kaori put the magic power extracted from the young man into the bracelet made of God Crystal that she received from Hajime. Apparently, the forced drain from the high-ranked magic was effective.

Incidentally, the reason it was not a ring was because Hajime didn't want to repeat the past misunderstanding.

Gradually, the young man's breathing became steady. The redness of his body also disappeared as it seemed the bleeding was also stopped. After deactivating "Holy Ground," Kaori activate beginner-ranked healing magic, "Blessing," which healed the young man's blood vessels.

"For the time being… I don't think it will have an immediate effect as I don't see any real solution for it. There's also the possibility of a slow death from over magic power extraction, so I only extracted it until the level where the pressure inside his body is decreased. If this keeps up, I think the possibility of a slow death from either pressure from inside his body or fatigue is… high. I also have no memory of such a symptom from the things I studied… Do Yue and Tio know anything about it?"

With the young man out of the crisis, Kaori was somewhat relieved but anxious as she could not heal him completely. Thus she asked Yue and Tio whose knowledge was deep. The two's gazes wandered around as they searched about it inside their memory, but there was none. In the end, it became a situation where they could not even say that it was a disease of an unknown cause.

"Kaori, just to be safe, try to examine us too. After all, there's also the possibility that it is an unknown disease that is spread by aerial infection too. Well, there's no need to worry about it if it is just a rampaging of magic power."

"Un, you are right."

Nodding at Hajime's words, Kaori examined everyone and didn't find any abnormalities. Therefore, because it seemed not to infect anyone from respiration, Hajime's party patted their chests in relief.

When they did that, the young man raised a groan and his eyelids trembled. Thus, he woke up. Slowly opening his eyes and then looking at his surrounding, the young man saw the nearby Kaori was watching him in worry and he said, "Goddess? I see, so this that world…"

Following that, the young man began to heat up for different reason and tried to reach out towards Kaori only to have his stomach trampled by Hajime, who didn't conceal his irritation from the already annoying heat and sand.

“Ufffph!?”

“H-Hajime-kun!?”

Leering at the groaning young man, whose body bent into <, and Kaori, who raised a surprised voice, Hajime began to question him.

Hajime knew that the garaveya-like clothing and overcoat worn by the young man was a specialty of the «Dukedom of Ancadi» that was located in the biggest oasis of «Guryuu-en Great Desert». He studied it as way of escaping reality at the time he was called “incompetent.” If the young man says that a kind of disease was spreading in Ancadi then they would change their next destination due to the current one being a danger zone. Thus he asked the young man.

Regaining his senses after being trampled by Hajime, the young man didn’t even look at Hajime’s party surrounding him and stared at the black object, blinking in confusion. After hearing the rough circumstances from Kaori,and understanding that Hajime’s party were his life benefactors, he bowed his head, said his thanks, and began his story.

Hearing the young man’s story, *is it those Gods playing tricks on us?*, Hajime was looking at the sky doubtfully because trouble always followed them wherever they went.

Chapter 4 : Dukedom of Ancadi

Because of his peculiar condition before, the young man, though he regained consciousness, could not stand straight. Furthermore, because of the danger of dehydration due to the desert’s temperature and his considerably sweating, the young man was invited into the vehicle and allowed to drink some water inside.

The young man was forced to acknowledge that the four-wheeler was some sort of carriage, and he feels giddiness from the comfortability inside it. However, when he recalled that he could not finish his mission if he stopped mid-way, he pulled himself together as there was no time to enjoy such luxury. Then, he introduced himself to Hajime’s party who saved him.

“First, let me say my appreciation for your help. Thank you very much. When I thought I was going to die in this state… Ancadi would be finished. My name is Viz Fuad Zengain. Son of the Dukedom of Ancadi’s ruler, Randzi Fuad Zengain.”

Surprisingly, the young man called Viz was an important person. Ancadi itself is the key point in transporting marine products so the freshness would not drop by much from Elisen, where 80% of marine products were produced in that northern part of the continent. In other words, by being the main supplier of the food from the northern part of the continent, Ancadi held the monopoly. Ancadi's ruler himself was not only a distinguished noble but a great noble who was trusted by Herrlicht Kingdom.

Hearing Kaori's identity of being one of the "God's Apostle" and someone summoned from different world, as well as how Hajime's party was made up of Gold-ranked adventurers, Viz was so astonished that his eyes popped out. Thus, he thought, *Is this a command from God!? Even a Goddess is sent to us!*, and he suddenly prayed to the heavens. In this case, the Goddess, Kaori, was dumbfounded by him. Hajime urged him to tell them the situation while leaking a slight Pressure, making Viz clear his throat and begin to talk while drenched in cold sweat.

What Viz told them was,

Four days ago, people collapsing with a high fever of an unknown cause began appearing one after another in Ancadi. It was really a sudden, with 3,000 people out of 270,000 falling unconscious in the first day, and those with similar symptoms reached 20,000 people. The medical center filled instantly, and it continued to fill up the communal center. The medical personnels were treating the patients while looking for the cause of the disease, but, just like Kaori, they could only delay it without curing any.

While it happened, the number of patients kept increasing one after another. Before long, infected medical personnels began to appear. The number overwhelmed the magic users capable of delaying the disease, and under such chaos, dead finally appeared among those who didn't receive the treatment. Despair shrouded the people due to the fact that people died only after the second day they were infected.

Within those, one pharmacist accidentally used "Liquid Judging" on the drinking water. Resultantly, it was known that the water contained poison, which resulted in rampaging of magic power. At once, survey team was formed. They examined Ancadi's oasis while assuming the worst situation in their mind, and as they thought, the oasis had been polluted.

Naturally, the oasis is a lifeline for a country located in the middle of the desert, so the guarding and maintenance were strictly managed by the one in charge. Thinking about it normally, it was not an exaggeration that it was impossible to take out the guards of Ancadi and poisoned the oasis even with all prepared measures.

From where, how, who… The survey team could only tilted their heads, but more importantly, because the stock of water from two days ago were not plenty, they didn't have any more water to use. Thus, it resulted with them having no other ways to save those infected from drinking the polluted water.

However, it wasn't like there wasn't any other method — there was a method to heal those infected. The method needed a mineral called "Serene Stone." This "Serene Stone" is a special mineral hat carried an effect to calm the magic power's activity and a small amount of this valuable mineral could be harvested in the northern rock zone near «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». If the "Serene Stone" was made into powder and drunk, it would be able to calm the rampaging magic power inside the bodies of the infected.

Even so, the northern rock zone was too far that it needed at least one month of travel using carriage. Moreover, Ancadi's adventurers, especially those capable of entering «Guryuu-en Great Volcano»'s dungeon, harvesting "Serene Stone," and returning, had already fallen to the disease. Half-assed adventurers could not even able to go through the desert storm wrapping «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». Besides, even if there were people with power to do so, they also did not have any stock of water safe to use, so it was necessary to ask for help from the Kingdom.

The requested help asked for water that could temporarily relieved 270,000 people in the Dukedom of Ancadi, in addition to powerful people capable of going to the dungeon of «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». However, it was not easy to arrange powerful people capable of doing that. Even though the request from the Dukedom could not be disregarded, the Kingdom would rather choose to investigate Ancadi's current condition first. Furthermore, the Kingdom would also deliberately make the procedures as a slow one.

That's why, Zengain, the one in power, thought it was necessary for Viz to be the representative and directly asking for reinforcement.

"Father, mother, and my little sister were infected, too, and although they managed to recover using the stock of Serene Stone in Ancadi, they were in a truly weakened state that they are incapable of going to the nearby city much less to the Kingdom. That's why I am the one to ask for the help and left Ancadi yesterday along with bodyguards. At that time, I didn't have any symptom… but I might have been infected. The appearance of the disease likely differs depending on the individual. I was agitated by this situation… my family falling sick, the duchy fell into disorder, and how we were argued on who was to immediately ask for rescue. It is also necessary to procure Serene Stone. And even right now, the lives of Ancadi's people are perishing… but I am in such a miserable condition!"

Even though he could not put strength into his body, Viz put strength into his fist and hit his thigh. He seemed to have a strong sense of responsibility towards the people as the next Lord of Ancadi. He might also be mortified by how his bodyguards were annihilated when the Sandworms attacked.

However, it was fortunately the Sandworms hesitated to eat him due to sensing the disease. Though he was exhausted due to the disease, it was also what caused the Sandworms not to attack him and resultantly, he met Hajime's party. Life is where one is unable to know what would happen next.

"… I want you, no, I request you as the formal representative of the Lord of Ancadi Dukedom. Please lend me your strength."

Saying so, Viz bowed his head. Silence filled the vehicle for a while. The sound of sand carried by the wind and hitting the windows greatly resounded. Viz himself knew that as the Lord's representative, he should not easily bow his head to someone else, but he was so desperate not to let go of such good fortune.

All gazes moved to Hajime. Though they left the decision to Hajime, everyone's gazes, except Yue and Tio's, were obviously telling him they wanted to help. Especially Kaori; she could not disregard such a situation as a "Healer." Her gaze was petitioning him. However, Myuu was more direct.

"Papa~. Won't Papa help him?"

She said while looking at him with a truly pure gaze. She seemed to believe Hajime could solve whatever the problem was, unconditionally. For Myuu, Hajime was her one and only hero. Towards Myuu, and Kaori's expectant gaze, "It can't be helped," Hajime shrugged his shoulders with wry feeling.

"Fufu," Shia and Tio chuckled at Hajime. Hajime immediately looked over his shoulder towards Yue, and Yue was… just the same as always. No matter what Hajime's decision was, she will lend him all of her might. Even without words, Yue's feelings were clearly transmitted to him. Hajime stroked Yue's cheek, and Viz his agreement to undertake the request.

To begin with, he had planned to go to «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», and he thought of entrusting Myuu to Ancadi at that time. After all, it wasn't right to bring along a four year old child into a Great Dungeon. As such, they didn't have any problem of procuring "Serene Stone" while conquering the dungeon, and there was no danger for Myuu, a child from demi-human race, since the source of the rampaging magic power disease was known. In the end, it was a problem Hajime could solve while completing his own agenda.

"With Hajime-dono's class being "Gold," I wanted you to gather "Serene Stone" from the Great Volcano first, but it is necessary to go to Imperial Capital first to secure our water. Can this movement type artifact be used by someone else other than Hajime-dono?"

"Well, except Kaori and Myuu, everyone can use it, but… there's no need to go all the way to the Imperial Capital. I will somehow secure the water, so I want to go to Ancadi first, what do you think?"

"Hajime-dono can somehow secure it? What does it mean?"

The words that Hajime was capable of securing the water for several hundred thousand people made Viz dubious, and it was natural to doubt it. However, even without transporting it, Hajime had a method to obtain water. It was to collect the moisture in the atmosphere using water element magic.

Of course it might be impossible for an ordinary magic-user, but by his side was the rare magic genius, Yue. Moreover, Yue had many means of instantly recovering her magic power. Also, Viz or Randzi would still have enough time to go to the Kingdom to ask for help again if they regained their physical condition and took the remaining Serene Stone in Ancadi along.

After briefly explained those, Viz could not believe it at first. After all the chance was so small for him to make it into the Kingdom in his current condition, but he agreed to return to Ancadi after being persuaded by Kaori, a "God's Apostle."

While being surprised once again from how four-wheeler moved in high-speed as if it was sliding in the desert, Viz wondered why a "God's Apostle" like Kaori was alone accompanied by the adventurers, why a child of Sea-dweller tribe called Hajime, a human, Papa, why they got along with someone from Rabbitman tribe, why a black-haired blooming woman made a disgusting smile though she being abused, but his chest was heated by the hope that came into his view.

* * *

Within the fluttering brown sand, the Ancadi they arrived at, just like Neutral Commercial City of Fhuren, was surrounded by wall and a milk-white one in this case. The outer wall and buildings were milky white in color, which created a beautiful contrast with the brown-colored outside world.

However, what differed from Fhuren were the pillars of light coming from the enclosing, irregular-shaped wall, which climbed towards the heavens. The pillars of light joined together in the sky, forming a gigantic dome, covering the entirety of

Ancadi. At times, it was as if the surface of water had something thrown into it; ripples were appearing, creating a mysterious and beautiful spectacle.

Apparently, this dome was preventing sand from entering the city. And although large sand storm sometimes appearing in time of full moon, the dome made none of the sand entered Ancadi and it was only looked like a cloudy weather from inside.

Hajime's party entered Ancadi from the shining, huge gate. Even a magic barrier was erected on the gate to not let sand entered. The gate guards, though surprised by seeing magic-driven four-wheeler, they didn't have energy to question it because of the gloomy atmosphere surrounding Ancadi; they seemed to have given up. However, when they noticed the next Lord sitting on the back seat of four-wheeler, they stood in attention, seeming to regain their energy as soldiers.

Ancadi's entrance gate was located in higher elevation. It seemed to be built in consideration of letting visitors to enjoy Ancadi's beauty.

Hajime's party were certainly admiring its beauty. The oasis in the east was glittering while being reflected by the sunlight, and a lot of lush green vegetations growing, surrounding it. The water from the oasis was flowing within the town like rivers and there were small boats moored here and there even though it was in the middle of desert. Lush green plazas were set up around the town which made one understood how spacious the city is.

On the north was the farmland. To prove the story of Ancadi's abundance of fruit production, Hajime could see numerous amounts of fruits growing as far as his "Farsight" could see. To the west side was a big, palace-like building with pure white color unlike the other buildings which were milky white. The impressiveness and scale made one understood that this is the dwelling of the Lord. Boorish looking buildings were lined up around the palace in order which was likely to be the government ward.

While it was a desert nation, it was also just like a capital of water… that's how Dukedom of Ancadi is.

Normally, this place would be actively doing business for fruits since it was the relay point from Elisen. Moreover, it was a popular place for sightseeing and should've been filled by vigor and clamor. But now, it was covered in a gloomy atmosphere. There were only few people on the street and no store was in business. All of the doors were firmly shut, as if they were quietly waiting for the storm to pass, crouching. The silence ruled the town.

"… I wanted to show our country filled with vigor to Miss Apostle and Hajime-dono. Unfortunately, we aren't in time for that. So, let me guide you around myself once everything is solved. For the time being, let's go to my father. He is in the palace."

The party nodded at Viz's words, and they advanced with the oasis as the background.

* * *

"Father!"

"Viz! You, wh—… No, wait, what's with you!?"

Entering the place using Viz's face as a pass, Hajime's party entered the Lord's, Randzi's, office. They heard the Lord was pretty weakened, but apparently he had used a lot of healing magic and medicine, and now was working in vigor.

Randzi was surprised that his son, who departed to the Imperial Capital to ask for help, had returned. Just like the workers inside the palace, Randzi was pop-eyed seeing his son's state.

It wasn't strange. After all, Viz was floating mid-air at the moment.

More accurately, he was in a falling prone state while being carried by a Cross Bit in mid-air. Viz was severely weakened, and although Kaori's healing magic managed to help him keeping his consciousness, he could not walk by himself. When Kaori couldn't bear with it any longer and tried to help, "Ah, Apostle-sama, for me…," Viz blushed and began to watch Kaori with moistened eyes. Thus, Hajime forcefully made the Cross Bit carried him.

Incidentally, it made it seemed Hajime was jealous. Thinking so, Kaori's cheeks were reddened and she took a peek at Hajime, but it was simply because Hajime didn't want to create another Kouki or Hiyama.

Even though he was in such a miserable appearance, clinging to the Cross Bitt, Viz quickly finished explaining to his father. As the talk advanced, a butler-like person came bringing in a powdered form of Serene Stone which Viz drank, who was still receiving Kaori's healing magic. Thus, he was cured as if there was no obstacle to prevent him from being cured.

Even so, it was only a feeling; the toxin itself was still inside his body's liquid. It was simply the effect of Serene Stone doing its work. The toxin was merged with his body's liquid, so there was possibility of it being excreted, and there was nothing more that could be done.

"Well then, we should get going. Kaori, you go with Shia to the medical center where the patients are. Bring along Magic-Crystallization Stones. The rest will be securing the water. Lord, is there a broad space around 200 meters on all sides at the lowest?"

"Hmm? Um, though there's one in the farming area…"

"Then, other than Kaori and Shia, we will go there. Shia, you must go to Yue if the Magic-Crystallization stones are full."

Hajime issued instruction to all of the members. What Hajime's party needed to do was simple. Just like Viz's case, Kaori will use "Holy Ground" to extract magic power from the patients little by little and delayed the disease's progression using "Ten Thousand Heaven." The extracted magic power will be stocked inside Magic-Crystallization stones. Then, it will be carried to and used by Yue to create water once they were filled.

After he helped Yue create a reservoir, Hajime will go towards the Oasis. He was going to investigate the cause. He will solve it if he find the cause, but if not, he will just go to «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». It was such a plan.

Everyone nodded vigorously towards Hajime's instruction.

* * *

Currently, the Lord, Randzi, the guards, and his attendants went to a corner of the farmland area in northern part of Ancadi, followed by Hajime, Yue, Tio, and Myuu. The plain was almost three times of the 200 meters on four sides. Normally, it was the place where a certain crop was grown, but it was now in its resting period.

Currently, the dubious Randzi was staring dagger into Hajime's party expressing that if not for the emergency situation, they would receive capital punishment. Although he truly wanted to secure water, common sense told him Hajime's plan was an impossible one thus it couldn't be helped that Randzi was glaring at him.

However, his doubting gaze was instantly turned into an astonished after Yue used her magic.

""Threat Destroyer.""

A black, swirling orb immediately appeared above the farmland where her right hand was outstretched to. That orb changed its shape above the farmland, into a thin square which spread horizontally and the square was already around 200 meters in

length. Thus, after a moment of stagnation, it fell to the ground without making a sound and casually crushed the ground.

The ground sunk due to the terrific pressure, and the earth tremored. It was as if the ground itself was screaming. After a moment, the 200 meters on all side of the farm that had received the supergravity pressure formed a huge reservoir with five meters in depth.

Hajime sneaked a look at Randzi and his subordinates, and every single one of them had their jaws dropped far that their jaws might have dislocated. Their eyes widened and seemed to pop. The impact was too strong that they turned speechless, all of them were shouting, "Huwwhuuattt—!?", in their minds.

Having activated Age of Gods magic with half of its output, "Fuu," Yue exhaled. Although her magic power was exhausted by suddenly consuming a large amount of magic, her expression did not change since she felt only a slight tiredness. Though it would be okay if she took the magic stored inside Magic-Crystallization stone just like the battle in Ul, she thought of keeping the magic power inside the Magic-Crystallization stone as much as possible because they were going to challenge «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» after this. Moreover, because they were not in a battle, Hajime used Yue's other method of replenishing her magic power.

Yue's body was swaying as if she was about to fall, but she displayed she didn't need to be supported. It was something she wanted to do, so she didn't want to fall because of this. Eventually, with a *thud*, Yue's body leaned on Hajime's arm.

From behind her, Hajime embraced Yue a little, and lifted her. This time he was embracing her from the front. Yue was smiling in joy, and answered his embrace by wrapping her arms on Hajime's neck.

Following that, "…Thank you for the treat." Then, she bit Hajime's neck.

BITE!~ CHU~,

Blood flowed from Hajime's body. Yue, absent-mindedly with moistened eyes, was licking Hajime's neck multiple times. Yue's amorousness despite her appearance was further increased when she sucked Hajime's blood. It made one think pheromones was discharged from all over her body, turning the atmosphere into one of a bewitchment.

Nh, ah, chu chu, fuu

The appearance of the beautiful little girl using her tongue to lick the scruff of Hajime's neck while making small, lewd, gasping sounds made everyone forgot to

question Yue's race, when thinking normally, was actually the hateful, bloodsucker. The surrounding men were slouching. Only the Lord, as expected of a Lord, had recovered from his astonishment and stared daggers at Hajime's party. A lot of things were swirling inside his head. He thought they were being a little too arrogant, he thought of things seriously and his eyes became bloodshot.

Incidentally, though Tio also wanted to exhibit her pervertedness, she was completely blindfolding Myuu from behind because it was too early for Myuu, while being aroused herself. "Myuu can't see~," Myuu complained only to be hugged from behind and could not resist since her head was wrapped by breasts far bigger than Shia's.

Converting Hajime's blood into magic power using "Blood Conversion," Yue quietly separated from Hajime's neck after she licked it for once more. Then, she kissed Hajime's lips. Hajime and Yue were looking at each other with burning gazes and *Ahem!*, it ended with coughs. They came from Randzi, the Lord, and the slouching men. Thinking they overdid it, Hajime and Yue made wry smiles… then they turned around and began to kiss again.

"No, no, no, you should do it where we can't see… I also have various guesses about that thing, the bloodsucker, but for the time being, I want you to do the thing that should be done… Rather, shouldn't you be the one who understands it the most!?"

The Lord's rebuttal made Hajime and Yue shrugged their shoulders in reluctance, leering at Randzi and the others who were irritated by their gestures, they began their work.

Hajime went into the reservoir, and took out the four-wheeler from "Treasure Box." Using land-leveling function installed in four-wheeler, he used "Mineral Separation" and coated the surface of the reservoir with metal so water couldn't be absorbed. After Hajime returned when he finished the coating, Yue thrust out her arm and used water element magic against the instant-reservoir.

""Fissuring Wave.""

It was one of the high-ranked, Water element magic which created a huge wave to crush the enemies. For an ordinary magic-user, though it was called a huge wave, it would only be a tsunami around ten to twenty meters, squarely. However, the number changed once Yue used it. A tsunami with width of 150 meters and height of 100 meters was created, immediately flowing into the reservoir. In the middle of it, she sucked Hajime's blood so many times to replenish her magic power, and thus, as much as half of her magic power was saved. However, there was also a limit on how much blood Hajime had.

Any further, he would become anaemic due to loss of blood, but Shia came at this time. In her hands were the Magic-Crystallization stones from Kaori. Although it was drained little by little, the magic power was drained from several thousands of patients. Thus, a large amount had been saved up. Not even two hours had passed since Kaori came to the medical center, but in such a short time, Kaori was able to treat a large number of patients. She certainly was also a cheat-like character.

Shia returned to help Kaori again and at the same time, Yue activated "Fissuring Wave" in rapid succession. Before long, the forty thousand square meters reservoir was filled with fresh, unpolluted water.

"…Such a thing…"

Dumbfounded, Randzi was staring at the surface of water before him, reflecting by the sunlight and glittering just like an oasis. He was speechless.

"It is enough for now. Next, I am going to examine the oasis… if I don't come to understand anything, then it is okay for you to ask for water from the Kingdom at that time."

"Ah, yeah. Well, I have a lot I want to ask… but thank you. You have my gratitude. With this, my people won't die from dehydration. Also, let me guide you to the oasis."

Although Randzi was still recovering from the shock, he knew what should be done, so his attitude completely changed and he sincerely said his gratitude to Hajime's party.

Hajime and the others moved straight to the oasis.

Unchanging, the oasis was beautifully glittering, reflecting the sunlight, and it did not seem to contain any poison.

However…

"…Nn?"
"…Hajime?"

Frowning, Hajime stared at a spot inside the oasis. Noticing his change, Yue tilted her head and asked Hajime with a doubtful expression.

"Well, that, my Magic Eye was reacting to something just now… Lord, to what length has the survey team examined it?"

"… I am certain it was the substances inside the oasis and the river flowing from it. They also investigated the substance in various wells and the underground river. The water's substance was just as you heard from my son, but no abnormality was found in the underground river. Moreover, the range of examination was only several tens of meters from the oasis. The bottom of the oasis itself hadn't been examined."

"Had an artifact sunk into the oasis?"

"? No, I don't think so. Although the guards and the management of the oasis used an artifact, it was set up above the ground… It is a barrier-type artifact, so it shouldn't be able to pollute the oasis. As for the proof, the oasis had never been polluted before."

The artifact Randzi spoke about was called "Cutter of What Intended," and it was actually the dome of light protecting Ancadi. It was a useful barrier that prevented sand from entering while allowing the necessity such as air and moisture to pass through, but the things capable of passing could also be decided by the setter. In addition, it was not just a simple barrier since it also had detecting function, and what was detected could also be set. By setting it in default, it was possible to detect whether one's soul was affected by a magic of dark element.

In other words, if it was set to "those who have malicious intent towards the oasis," the person who set it, Randzi, would know if the "Cutter of What Intended" was reacting to something. However, the Lord himself didn't know whether there was a hidden requirement. Incidentally, up until now, a lot of people had been going in and out during the examination while the guards had been off-duty due to the oasis being polluted already.

"…Hee~. Then, I wonder what's with that."

Having the oasis of Dukedom of Ancadi polluted, the appearance of Randzi clenching his fists in bitterness made one think he was indeed Viz's father. Looking at Randzi with narrowed eyes, Hajime laughed while understanding Randzi had misunderstood his words. Hajime's Magic Eye was certainly seen "something" releasing magic power in the bottom of the center of the oasis.

The thing that shouldn't be there made Randzi and the others agitated. Coming near the oasis, Hajime took out a 500ml pet bottle-shaped metal object from "Treasure Box" and supplied it with magic power. Next, he casually threw it into the oasis.

Trotting, Hajime moved away from the oasis and stood next to Yue. Though everyone wore doubtful expressions, Hajime didn't say anything. Following that, Randzi finally came to ask Hajime. And at that moment,

BAAAANNNGGGG!!!

A huge explosive sound rang out accompanied by the oasis spouting a huge column of water. Randzi and his subordinates were once again slackjawed and pop-eyed.

"Tch, was it evaded? …No, it must be because it has high defense, huh?"

Saying so, Hajime took out ten of the same thing and thrown them into the oasis. Following that, after several seconds, huge explosions and huge columns of water appeared all over the oasis.

What Hajime threw were the so called torpedo. Because the next Seven Great Dungeon over the Elisen, «Meljeenae's Seabed Ruin», was located at the bottom of the sea (according to the information from Miledi), Hajime made prototypes of weapons that could be used in the sea, the torpedo. He threw them because he now had the time and a place to experiment them. The result was, although it had a good amount of power, its homing and speed was not that good. Improvements were necessary.

The torpedoes were equipped with crystal created by Creation magic which was capable of "Specific Perception" and "Pursuit." They would run after the enemy, and once the enemy was locked, it would explode upon contact. What it meant was, something was inside the water, and he used the experimental weapons to chase after it.

"Oy, oy, oy! Hajime-dono! What in the world are you doing!? Ahh! The pier is blown off! The fishes are dead! The oasis is dyed in red!"

"Tch, it still couldn't be caught, huh. Well then, next will be 50…"

Randzi was screaming because of the scenery of the oasis was gradually turning worse, but Hajime muttered without a care and moved out. Randzi, along with his subordinates clung to Hajime, desperately trying to stop him.

From Randzi's view who didn't know about the "something" seen by Hajime's Magic Eye, Hajime had suddenly threw out unknown objects which blasted the oasis one after another along with the pier and the fishes. It was a confusing situation since the barrier didn't see it as an evil, destructive action. Randzi couldn't conceal his confusion, however, he still desperately tried to protect the oasis.

Irritated by Randzi and the others clinging to him, Hajime tried to shake them off as he advanced. However,

WOOOOSH!

Numerous tentacles came out of the water cutting the wind, and it attacked Hajime and the others. Immediately, Hajime intercepted it some using Donner-Schlag and the tentacles coming out of the water were blown off. Yue froze them while Tio used fire to evaporate the tentacles.

As Randzi and his subordinates looked at the oasis, wondering what happened, but they were once again astonished by the spectacle of something appearing from the oasis. They thought the surface of the water raised because of anger from Hajime's bombing. It kept rising up and became a little mountain with the height of around ten meters.

"What is… that…"

Randzi muttered with a blank expression, but his words were resounded clearly.

Chapter 5 : The Thing Lurking in the Oasis

The thing appearing in the oasis was 10 meters in length, it has numerous tentacles wriggling around, and a magic stone shining in red was inside of it. A slime… it was the most suitable word to describe it.

However, its size was abnormal. Slime-type demonic beasts were normally one meter in length, at best. Moreover, there should be none with power to manipulate the surrounding water. It should only capable of manipulating tentacles that were part of its own body.

"What the… what's with that demonic beast? Is it… a Vachram?"

Randzi muttered in blank surprise. Vachram itself was a slime-type demonic beast of this world.

"Well, I don't care whatever it is. In the end, isn't this the thing polluting the oasis? So, it is most likely to have a peculiar magic that excreted the poison."

"… What you're thinking should be right. But, can Hajime-dono defeat it?"

While Hajime and Randzi were conversing, the Oasis-Vachram was still attacking in anger by using its tentacles. Yue and Tio were dealing with those tentacles with ice magic and fire magic respectively. Hajime was also intercepting while talking using Donner-Schlag, and though he aimed at the core-like red magic stone, he could not easily hit it since the magic stone moved around the body, as if it had its own will.

Seeing Hajime's artifacts and magic from Yue and Tio, Randzi had given up being surprised and decided to just ignore them which resulted in him being capable of calmly ask Hajime that question.

"Nn~… yeah, there's no need to worry. I've caught it now."

Replying casually to Randzi's question, Hajime quietly put Schlag back into its holster and used both hands to ready Donner while narrowing his eyes, following the track of the moving magic stone. His right arm thrusted straight forward and left arm's elbow slightly bent. His feet, one positioned forward and one backward. It was the shooting posture called Weaver Stance, the pose to accurately fire Donner.

Hajime's eyes sharply narrowed just like those of a hawk's, completely capturing the movement of that magic stone. Then…

KABOOM!!

With a dry explosive sound, a line of flash cut through the air as though they were pulled by a magnetic force. The moving magic stone, while ignoring the law of inertia, was shot through by the flash, and it could be said the magic stone was being voluntarily being hit.

The impact and heat from the railgun instantly annihilated the magic stone, and at the same time, Oasis-Vachram lost its power and the water it manipulated returned into normal water. *WoOoOoOSH~!* A large amount of water poured down. Randzi and his subordinates were watching the generated rough waves.

"… Is it over?"

"Ah, there's no more magic power reaction from the oasis now. I don't know whether annihilating the cause is equal to purifying it though."

With Hajime's words indicating he easily repulsed the cause of Ancadi's desperate situation only made Randzi and his subordinates puzzled. Even so, because the cause was certainly annihilated before their own eyes, one of Randzi's subordinate came to examine the water's substance in a panic.

"… How is it?"
"… No, it is still polluted."

Randzi asked with an expectant tone, but his subordinate was shaking his head in disappointment. They knew the people were infected by the water drawn from the oasis, but they could not conceal their disappointment after finding out that it was still polluted even though Oasis-Vachram was no longer there.

"Well, there's no need for thee to be disappointed. With the cause gone, the pollution won't advance. And the water from the oasis comes from the fresh water in the underground water pulse, so the oasis will be able to return to its normal state if the polluted water is exhausted."

Tio told Randzi and his subordinates to comfort them, thus Randzi and his subordinates began to pull themselves together, displaying their wills. Their appearances, with Randzi, ruler of Ancadi, in the center showed how much they loved this country. It was a country that existed in a severe environment, so the patriotism was high.

"… But, I wonder just why that Vachram-like demonic beast is doing in the desert… Was it a new kind of demonic beast that came from underground water pulse?"

Having pulled himself together, Randzi tilted his head while looking at oasis. And Hajime was the one who answered him.

"It is just my guess, but… it was probably the work of Demon race, right?"

"!? Demon race? Hajime-dono, you must know something to be able to say that, right?"

Randzi was surprised by Hajime's words, but he instantly regained his composure and urged Hajime to explain. Randzi was looking at Hajime, the one who secured the water and annihilated the cause of pollution, with respect and trust. There's no more trace suspicion that he had in the beginning.

Hajime guessed the Oasis-Vachram was a new demonic beast created by Age of Gods magic Demon race had. There's the peculiarity of Oasis-Vachram, coupled with the fact the Demon race was also aiming at Aiko in Ul and the Heroes in Orcus.

It was probably one of Demon race's scheme, using demonic beast. The Demon race was investigating and erasing dangerous, unknown element and the key point in northern of the continent before the war. The proofs were how they aimed at Aiko, an existence that could affect food supply, and the Heroes from another world the Church of the Saints summoned to fight against Demon race.

As for Ancadi, it was the key point of food supply since it was the relay point of marine products from Elisen and it also produced large amount of fruits and other food ingredients. Moreover, if Ancadi was attacked, it was hard to call for help because it is located in the middle of the Great Desert. So, it wouldn't be odd for Demon race to aim for Ancadi.

Being told so, Randzi raised a low groan with a bitter expression.

"I've heard about the demonic beast. We also did our own investigation about it but… I've never expected they could create such a thing… how naive of me."

"Well, it isn't something you can help, right? After all, even the Imperial Capital didn't get information about new kinds of demonic beasts. Furthermore, the case where the Hero's party was attacked was only recently. And that must have created commotions everywhere right now."

"Maybe it is about time for them to move make a move, huh… Hajime-dono… although you introduced yourself as an adventurer… those artifacts and power, as expected, you are the same as Kaori-dono…"

Without saying anything, Hajime shrugged his shoulders, thus Randzi stopped asking, thinking Hajime must have his own circumstance. No matter what the circumstance was, it didn't change the fact that Hajime's party saved Ancadi. There's no need to make any useless inquiry to their benefactors.

"… Hajime-dono, Yue-dono, Tio-dono. Let this Lord of Ancadi, Randzi Fuad Zengain, show his gratitude on behalf of this country. You have saved this country."

Saying so, Randzi and his subordinates bowed their heads. It wasn't an easy thing for the Lord himself to bow his head, but regardless whether Hajime is one of the "God's Apostles," Randzi would still bow his head. And although only a short time had passed, Hajime understood Randzi held an extraordinary patriotism. This was also the reason why his subordinates didn't stop Randzi from bowing his head to someone who introduced himself as a mere adventurer, and they also bowed their heads. Such personality was also passed onto his son, Viz. Their gesture, speech, and behavior were alike.

Towards them, Hajime was smiling broadly while saying,

"Ah, you have expressed your gratitudes. Also, please don't forget about this huge favor."

He expected them to return this favor. Well, it was not something new. Hajime said, "No, please don't worry about that. This is something natural to do as a person," clearly and humbly, thus Randzi was inadvertently dumbfounded thinking Hajime had casually said he wanted something. Randzi himself actually didn't mind giving him anything as his thank towards the country's saviors, but he didn't expect it to be said straight to his face.

Hajime had thought there's no need for gratitude since it was necessary for him to make Ancadi secure because he needed to entrust them with Myuu, and there's Kaori's request, too.

However, because they made their way to express their gratitude, it wouldn't be bad to have more people as allies in a time of emergency, so he clearly told them it was a favor. Hajime thought Randzi would sincerely correspond to it, but he was also a politician, so Hajime needed to make sure of it.

"Ah, ahh. Of course. It will be remembered forever… But, there are still many people suffering in Ancadi, can I ask your help in their behalf?"

It was something Randzi was used to, as a politician and as a noble, but Randzi was a little perplexed due to the too straight forward words said by Hajime. Before long, as if he had come to an agreement, Randzi nodded with a wry smile. Afterwards, he requested Hajime to procure "Serene Stone" for the sake of saving those infected.

"My original objective was «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». Thus, there's no problem in getting it at all. However, just how much should I gather?"

With Hajime easily accepting his request, Randzi patted his chest in relief, next he told Hajime the current number of patients and the amount needed to be gathered. Although it was a considerable amount, it was not a problem because Hajime possessed "Treasure Box." Normal adventurers might not be able to save all of the infected, so Randzi was thanking God to have met Hajime's party.

* * *

Accompanied by Shia inside the medical center, Kaori displayed storm-like activities. She simultaneously extracted magic power from the more urgent patients and filled the Magic-crystallization stones. She also delayed the progress of disease for the patients gathered within radius of ten meters from her and used healing magic at the same time to recover the patients from their weakened state.

Shia was using her herculean strength to move the immobilized patients at once. She wasn't moving using the wagon, but she lifted the wagon filled with the patients and jumped above the buildings, going back and forth the medical facilities. It was because it was more efficient to gather the more urgent patients around Kaori than her going around each of the facilities.

This method created an unbelievable spectacle starring the should be incompetent rabbit-eared girl, made a lot of patients begin to think their disease had gotten worsen, and thus created such illusion. Despair poured into the medical facilities, creating unnecessary chaos.

The medical staff themselves had used high-ranked magic in succession, and they became astonished when they saw Kaori used several healing magic simultaneously

as if it was a natural thing. Once their astonishment passed, they now held deep respect towards Kaori, and treated the patients according to Kaori's instructions.

Hajime and the others arrived at the group gathered around Kaori. Afterwards, Randzi spoke out loud about the water being secured and how the cause had been annihilated which resulted with everyone shouting out of joy at the same time. Smiles began to return to the people who were despairing from the amount of death and how they could not secure safe water in the middle of the desert.

The information was immediately conveyed to the other facilities. The infected people regained up their energies because they only needed to endure a little while and they would be saved.

"Kaori, we are going to challenge «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». So, how long can you hold on?"

"Hajime-kun…"

Inside the medical facilities filled with shouts of joy, Hajime walked up to Kaori, who didn't stop treating the patients, and asked.

Kaori was so glad once she seen Hajime's figure, but she immediately made a serious expression, watching an empty space. Next, she finished her calculation, turned to look at Hajime and answered with, "Two days." She might have judged that was the very limit regarding both her magic power and the patients' endurance.

"Hajime-kun. I, I will stay here and treat the patients. Please gather the Serene Stone. It seems to be a valuable mineral… but no one except Hajime can do it because a large amount is needed. I am sorry… even though I know Hajime-kun doesn't concern himself with this world…"

"If it's just that much, then I can just gather them while entering deeper into the volcano. It doesn't matter if I need to search on the surface… In short, I only need to conquer the dungeon faster. Also, there's no need for you to apologize. After all, it is something I decided myself… Besides, I couldn't just leave Myuu in a place where people collapsed and died, right?"

"Fufu… I see. Then, good luck, and leave Myuu-chan to me."

Kaori had heard about the Mad Gods and the purpose of Hajime's travel on their way to Ancadi. She also heard Hajime would return to their original world even if it means to abandon this world. He also told her to return to Kouki and the others if she couldn't agree to his way. Having heard all of those, Kaori's will didn't waver; she wanted to continue following Hajime.

Even in this current case, if Hajime decided to abandon Ancadi, and although she would try to persuade him, she would just give up if there's no effect.

However, it was the truth that she wanted to become the strength for the people of Ancadi, if she could. She was inadvertently looking at Hajime with petitioning gaze at that time when Hajime was thinking about his decision. She wasn't conceited that her desire would be the same as Hajime's decision, but Kaori's gaze must have influenced Hajime's decision since he shrugged his shoulders a little with a wry smile when he received her gaze.

That's why, the way it seemed that Hajime was going along with her selfish desire made Kaori hold a complex feeling.

However, Hajime only indifferently shook his hand towards the apologizing Kaori. Having seen through Kaori's feeling, he told her not to mind since it was something he decided on. Kaori smiled at Hajime, who was worried about her although he said so in a blunt manner, and who casually showed a father-like attitude. She looked at him with a gaze filled with trust and affection.

"I will also do my best… so please come back safely. I will be waiting…"

"…O-okay."

Kaori, who narrowed her eyes dearly and exuding an aura of a wife who sends off her husband to the battlefield, made Hajime stammer inadvertently.

Since before, Kaori had been a straightforward person. Even when they were in Japan, Kaori mercilessly cut down Kouki's misunderstanding, dropping bomb onto Hajime which resulted in the classroom to suffer the storm of jealousy… those had become their daily life. And she was being even more frank since the day she confessed to him.

Hajime somehow managed to avert his gaze, but the place he averted to was… where Yue was. He saw it; Yue was watching Hajime in silence with dead, inorganic eyes. It was really terrible. He instinctively changed his gaze other way, and Kaori was there smiling with affection…

But seeing Kaori's atmosphere, our idol, Myuu dropped a bomb.

"Kaori-oneechan, Kaori-oneechan looks just like Yue-oneechan from before. Is Kaori-oneechan going to kiss Papa~?"

"Oya? So thou saw it, Myu?"

"Uh~? Myuu saw it from the gap between the fingers. Yue-oneechan looked so lovely~. Myuu also wants to kiss Papa~."

"U~m. Even this one hath not done that, thou know? So, Myuu need to wait until Myuu is bigger."

"Uu~."

Myuu's innocent words made Hajime say, "This good for nothing!" an unjust anger towards Tio. As expected, with "Those eyes! Those eyess! Tres Bien!" Tio began to be aroused, but it was something trivial this time.

As for the reason, a katana-shouldering Hanya appeared right beside Hajime. Of course, it was Kaori.

"…What does that mean, ah? Wasn't Hajime-kun going there to work on something? So, why did you kiss Yue? Tell me, how did it come to that? Was there any need to do that? While I was desperately treating the patients, the two of you were enjoying yourselves, ah? Did you even forget about me? Rather, did we separate just so you could be alone?"

Eyes without light, Kaori was looking at Hajime with a Hanya behind her. Cold sweats ran along Hajime's cheeks. Hajime wanted to say it was because of the bloodsucking act; he and Yue wouldn't be separated unless they kiss. But faster than him, Yue advanced.

Hajime had expected her to solve the misunderstanding, but he was a fool to expect that from Yue in this kind of situation.

Yue and Kaori looked at each other, and Yue puffed her chest in a dignified manner. Smiling after saying *fu*,

"… It was delicious." She informed Kaori.

"Aha, ahahahahaha."

"Fufu, fufufufufufu."

Eerie laughter coming from the two beautiful girls was echoing inside the medical center. Up until now, the staff of medical center and patients thought of Kaori as a saint, but now they were taken aback and turned their faces away so their eyes would not meet hers.

It was something they couldn't help. No one would think a person with katana-swinging Hanya behind then was a saint. Moreover, the one confronting her had a dragon clad in black clouds and thunders. They couldn't help but wanting to look away.

Towards Kaori and Yue, who were staring at each other while laughing, Hajime sighed and quickly decided to approach them to deliver forehead flicks. *Shwip!* An unbelievable sound rang out from the impact of the flicks. Yue and Kaori spontaneously groaned and squatted. With teary eyes, they looked up, expressing, "What are you doing," which made Hajime raised an amazed expression.

"Kaori. It's not like I and Yue had wanted to do such an act. You understand it, right? Besides, Yue is my lover. We don't need your permission to do such a thing."

"Uh… that is so… but I don't think it is the real reason…"

Angered by that, Kaori objected to Hajime. Hajime sighed again and said, "Yue, too, there's no need to always bicker like that." However, *hmph!*, Yue turned her face and refused to listen to him, "This is a woman's fight… there's no need for Hajime to interfere."

Randzi and the others could only stand in place by the suddenly generated carnage. Shia reflected, "I noticed that recently my presence had been thinned." Tio was still panting hard, while Myuu turned into angry mode because Yue and Kaori were quarrelling again.

Hajime gave up on controlling the situation and decided to go to «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» as fast as possible. Kaori was not the only one being busy in the medical center, since although Hajime had told Randzi beforehand, he once again told Randzi to take care of Myuu. Smiling wryly at the relationship between Hajime and his party, Randzi readily agreed to take care of Myuu.

Myuu had been persuaded beforehand, but as soon as she guessed Hajime was going to leave, Myuu looked down with a lonely expression. Hajime kneeled to match Myuu's eye-level and patted her head.

"Myuu, I am going. Be a good girl and wait for me, okay?"

"Uh, Myuu will be a good girl. So come back quickly, Papa."

"Ah, I will return as fast as possible."

Grasping the end of her clothes tightly with both hands, Myuu was enduring her tears. And the appearance of Hajime gently patting Myuu, even if they weren't

related by blood, made everyone see them as nothing but a father and his child. The cold, post-carnage atmosphere has turned warm. Hajime pushed Myuu's back towards Kaori's side. Yue, Shia, and Tio moved out in order.

Hajime was about to turn on his heel, when Kaori called out to him.

"Ah, Hajime-kun… that's, have a safe journey."

"Ou, please take care of Myuu."

"Un… also, that is… can I ask for a, kiss? Like… a kiss to pray for a safe trip."

"… Of course you can't. Rather, what's with that?"

"On cheek is okay, too, you know? Still no?"

Although she was fidgeting with flushed cheeks, Kaori's tone was unexpectedly a strong one. Apparently her rivalry with Yue made her think she must not back out at such a time. Hajime recalled that he noticed Kaori was rather proactive at the time they were still in Japan, but the Kaori after confessing to him was even more proactive.

Hajime ignored the rabbit-ear who said, "Ah, then me, too!," from behind him and decided to flatly refuse Kaori, but he was attacked by an unexpected enemy.

"Myuu, too~. Myuu wants to kiss Papa, too!"

Kaori took an advantage of Myuu, who innocently reached out to Hajime. Hajime wanted to say a lot of things and evade her (Myuu isn't that strong after all), but finally,

"Papa, Papa hates Myuu?"

Saying so with teary eyes, Myuu endured herself from crying.

In the end, Kaori, Myuu, and somehow Shia were kissed on their cheek. And this time, in a place where a lot of patients were lying down, they were watched with warm gazes although they didn't know why. Afterwards, Hajime, as if running away, went towards «Guryuu-en Great Volcano».

By the way, although Tio also wanted a kiss, Hajime rashly insult her because she was being too cocky which resulted in her being even more excited. Let just say it turned into something disgusting.

Chapter 6 : Guryuu-en Great Volcano

«Guryuu-en Great Volcano»

It is situated 800 kilometers towards the north of the Dukedom of Ancadi. From what could be seen, it was a huge mountain five kilometers in diameter and 3,000 meters in altitude. It didn't have cone-like appearance similar to those of normal active volcanos. It has dome-like, flat top made of lava, and it would be more appropriate to call it a gigantic hill than a mountain. However, the altitude and scale were just abnormal.

The «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was commonly known as one of the Seven Great Dungeons. However, unlike «Orcus Great Dungeon», it wasn't much visited by adventurers. It was because of the danger inside and how troublesome it was. In addition, unlike the «Orcus Great Dungeon», demonic beasts from whom the magic stones were gathered from were scarce… those were the basic reasons, but the foremost was actually because only few people were capable of reaching the entrance.

The reason was,

"… It looks just like Laputa."

"… Laputa?"

Hajime unconsciously muttered while recalling the scene of that masterpiece anime, which made Yue and the other girls look at him with questioning glances. Hajime only shrugged his shoulders and watched the gigantic swirling sandstorm from inside the four-wheeler.

That's right, just like how the floating castle was wrapped by cumulonimbus cloud, the «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was wrapped by gigantic, swirling sandstorm. The storm's scale was so huge that it completely hid the «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», and the tornados of the sandstorm were just like a flowing wall.

Moreover, a large amount of demonic beasts such as Sandworms were lurking inside the sandstorm, and they would mercilessly make surprise attacks within the place that had limited range of view. Thus, Hajime could only nod at the tale where people with average ability wouldn't be able to pass through the sandstorm, and into «Guryuu-en Great Volcano».

"I am glad we aren't walking here."

“Indeed, even I doth not wanteth to enter it with mine own body.”

Looking at the giant sandstorm from the window just like Hajime, Shia and Tio were grateful to the four-wheeler. Smiling wryly, Hajime said, “Then, let’s go.” and the four-wheeler dashed out. For this case, they didn’t come to conquer it leisurely. There wasn’t that much Serene Stone on the surface, so it was necessary to go into the untouched depth of the dungeon to obtain the amount needed. And if they go into the deepest part, there should be a shortcut similar to what they have experienced until now. As such, they would be able to immediately return to Ancadi.

Hajime, himself, wasn’t interested in the safety of Ancadi’s people, but he didn’t mind helping them. By doing so, he would at least not to feel guilty towards his companion, Kaori, nor would he let Myuu see a spectacle that would bring great shock to her.

While thinking this, Hajime regained his spirit and charged into the gigantic sandstorm.

Inside the sandstorm was a world painted in brown. Just like in the fog of«Halteena Sea of Trees», it was hard to see ahead. It was also capable of influencing one’s physical condition, so it might be more troublesome than that fog. Thus, even using magic, breaking through this place filled with hidden demonic beasts was indeed virtually impossible.

Light coming from the headlight made out of Green Light stone cut through the dim place where the sunlight could not reach. Their speed was 30 kmph. If the information they got before was accurate, they would break through the sandstorm within five minutes.

And at that time, Shia’s rabbit ears stood straight and Hajime also reacted, one beat after her. “Brace yourself!,” Hajime raised his voice, and grandly turned the steering wheel.

Three sandworms with their big mouths opened and jumped out from below. Evading the ambush, the four-wheeler created S-letter on the ground, and Hajime kept running away without a care. With four-wheeler’s speed, it would be better to quickly get out of the sandstorm than fighting each time something appeared.

Two more sandworms came to attack from both sides of four-wheeler while it was dashing out and ignored the previous three sandworms. Their timing was so good that the four-wheeler’s body would receive body blows. However, it would hit without damaging the four-wheeler at all, and the four-wheeler would only be turned sideways. That’s why, once Hajime grasped the surprise attacks using “Sign

Perception," he immediately tried to drift to evade. However, Yue and Tio stopped him.

"…Nn, leave it to me."

" Just leaveth it to this one, Master."

Hearing the two, Hajime unhesitatingly kept the steering wheel straight as it was. Then, the gigantic worms dashed out of the brown colored world.

However, the attacks coming from the sandworms from left and right side couldn't even touch four-wheeler.

""""Wind Blade."""""

Seeing the sandworm on the left, Yue muttered and a blade of wind was instantly produced outside the four-wheeler and fired, drawing a trajectory using the sand on the air. Thus the sandworm that jumped out before them was horizontally slashed, and blood scattered from the divided sandworm.

That spectacle was similar to what happened on the right side, which Tio had taken care of.

"Hmm, as expected of thee, thee fired a good wind."

"… There's no way I won't use the wind from the sandstorm. Tio, too, as expected of you."

Similarly, they instantly chose to use wind element magic, "Wind Blade," and though it was a beginner-ranked magic, the "Wind Blades" previously fired were as strong as mid-ranked magic. The reason was because they used the raging wind outside. Simply, the strength of magic wasn't only affected by magic power, thus the best magic used was selected according to the condition and environment of the location. However, even though saying it was simple, it was difficult to actually do it. For Yue and Tio to be capable of doing it, it was indeed as expected of their competency.

Behind them, the three sandworms from before were still following. They had considerable speed as they advanced under the ground. Irritated by them, Hajime activated four-wheeler's gimmick. *Briiing!* Such a sound came from back part of four-wheeler and one of its rear part opened. Several black, round objects rolled down from there.

The moment some met up with the sandworms pursuing the four-wheeler, they created huge explosions. The impact blew away the ground, and the sandworms advancing underground came out of the ground while scattering flesh and blood. Towards the sandworms, more black object, grenades, rolled and caused more explosions that blew away half of each of the sandworms. Their upper-bodies were blown off, fluttered mid-air, and disappeared inside the sandstorm.

"Uhya~, amazing. Hajime-san, just how many functions are installed in this four-wheeler?"

Shia asked Hajime while looking at sandworms that were flashily blown away from the back window. Hajime was wearing a mischievous smile.

"It is capable of transforming into human-shaped weapon, a gigantic golem."

"""…"""

Although they wanted to say it was impossible, they knew Hajime could do it, thus not only Shia, Tio and Yue were also began to silently look around inside the vehicle. Smiling wryly, Hajime said, "It was a joke. As expected, I can't make such function… I want to though." However, Yue and the girls were convinced that Hajime would someday capable of creating that.

Afterwards, the composed Hajime's party were also attacked by brown-colored, gigantic spider, and ant-like demonic beasts. However, all of them were crushed by four-wheeler's armament and magic from Yue and Tio without accomplishing anything, not even halting the party's advance.

Ignoring Shia who said, "I am useless here," from the back seat, Hajime's party easily broke through the gigantic sandstorm that had obstructed a lot of adventurers.

Buuahh! Hajime's party came out of the sandstorm and arrived at a rocky mountain several times bigger than Ayers Rock. It was a silent place surrounded by the wall-like sandstorm where the blue sky could be seen up above — the eye of the storm.

The entrance into «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was at the top, so they continued to travel up on the slope using four-wheeler. The exposed rocky surface was reddish red in color, and steams gushed from here and there. Though it was an active volcano, the point where it never erupted was a Great Dungeon-like wonder.

Before long, the angle became more difficult for four-wheeler to advance, so Hajime's party got out of the four wheeler and went towards the top of the mountain on foot.

"Uwau… i-it's hot."

"Nn~…"

"Indeed. … the heat is in a different scale compared to the heat of desert's dry weather… Even without the time limit, it would be better to quickly conquer the dungeon, huh."

"Hmm, though this one feels comfortable here… this one can't wait… to feel so hot that this body would writhes in agony."

"… I will drop you into the magma later."

Attacked by the heat as soon as they got out of the four-wheeler, other than Tio, all of them made dissatisfied expressions. Due to them being in air-conditioned place before, they felt even hotter. As adventurers in another world and travelers, for them to have withdrawal symptom similar to shut-in was… just reaping what they sowed.

They didn't have much time, so while complaining about the heat, they quickly went towards the mountain top, climbed the rocky place quickly as if they didn't feel any weight. As a result, Hajime's party reached the top of the mountain in less than one hour.

They arrived at the top, a complex place buried by rocks of various sizes. There were rocks with pointed surface and also those with slippery, smooth surface. It was just like an exhibition of strange objects. Also, they could feel the top of the sandstorm nearby.

There was an exceptionally huge rock, and a group of strange-shaped rocks. It was an arch-shaped rock with the length of ten meters.

Hajime's party went there and found huge staircase that continued on into «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» under the arch-shaped rock. Hajime stood before the staircase and looked over his shoulder towards Yue, Shia, and Tio's faces in order. With a confident expression, he said a word to challenge the Great Dungeon.

"Let's do it!"

"Nn!"

"Yes!"

"Umh!"

* * *

The inside of «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was even more unexpected than «Orcus Great Dungeon» and «Raisen Great Dungeon».

Rather than the difficulty, it was the interior's structure that was unexpected.

First, magma was flowing mid-air. Not flowing like the waterway in dem-ihuman country, Faea Belgaen, but the magma was in the mid-air and flowing like rivers. The streaming, scorching red magma in mid-air was just like huge, jumping dragons.

Thus, the magma flowing around the passage and broad space made not only the dungeon challenger be cautious about the magma on the ground, but also above them.

Moreover,

"Ukya!"
"Woops, are you okay?"

"Ha~, Hajime-san, thank you. It was impossible for me to perceive that… the magma would suddenly spout from the ground."

Exactly what Shia said, the magmas abruptly spouted from all around the walls. It was really abrupt that it was difficult to perceive any prior sign of it. It was similar to that of a booby trap. Fortunately, Hajime has "Heat Perception." Without it, their conquering speed would've fallen due to the need to be cautious.

Following that, the thing that made it truly difficult was the boiling heat — extreme heat. It was naturally hot due to magma streaming all around the passage and broad space which made the party feel like being inside a sauna, or to be more accurate, above a heated frying pan. The heat was the most troublesome thing about «Guryuu-en Great Volcano».

While sweating, Hajime's party continued to advance while evading the drops of and the spouting magma. And in a certain broad space, they found the place has artificial cut all over the place. The place was worn down by cuts that seemed to come from something like a pickaxe, but there was a small, faint pink-colored crystal peeping from one part of the wall.

"Oh? That thing. Serene Stone… right?"

"Hmm, twas indeed that, Master."

Hajime's questioning-like words were confirmed by Tio whose knowledge was broad. Apparently, this seemed to be the place the adventurers, who passed through the sandstorm and entered «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», mined the stone.

"… So small."

"The ones at others' places were also in a size of small stones…"

Just as Yue said, the remaining Serene Stone was only almost as big as little finger. Though those could be taken out and carried, but the size was indeed too small. As expected, it was too inefficient to gather the ones on the surface, so it was necessary for them to go into the depth to be able to obtain a lot of it in a dash.

For now, Hajime used "Mineral Enquiry" to search around for Serene Stone. After he stored those that could be gathered easily, he urged Yue and the girls to move ahead, quickly.

While being disgusted by the heat, they descended into the seventh floor. It was the highest floor recorded to be reached by the adventurers. None of those who moved farther than this had come back alive. So, bracing themselves, Hajime's party descended into the eighth floor.

At that moment,

GRuuOoOOOO!!!

When they felt fanned by a strong hot wind, a huge blazing flame came to attack Hajime's party from right ahead of them. It advanced as it drew a spiral on the orange-colored wall.

""Absolute Calamity.""

Yue's magic activated against the blazing flame. A black, swirling orb appeared before Hajime's party. It was a gravity magic. However, it was not used to crush the object on the ground.

The flame that could easily burn a person to ash was pulled by the sphere which was only 60 centimeters in diameter and disappeared without a trace. The flame swallowed by the sphere was actually nullified. The black, swirling sphere, the gravity magic called "Absolute Calamity," was generating its own gravity, pulled those coming near it, and swallowed them into the inside of it, like a black hole.

When all of the blazing flame was swallowed by Yue's swirling supergravity, the party could see the identity of their attacker.

It was a bull. It stood in the middle of the magna, and its whole body was also cladded in magma. It had two sharp curved horns on its head, and flame was coming out of its mouth from time to time. The heat-proofness of this demonic beast made Hajime instinctively wanted to retort on it.

Maybe because the Magma Bull was angry that its peculiar magic, the blazing flame attack, was easily nullified, sounds of *thud! Thud!* could be heard from its legs and it turned into a charging stance.

To the Magma Bull, the swirling supergravity Yue created immediately moved as if being pulled toward the Magma Bull. At that moment, Magma Bull also attacked using compressed flame. The laser-like, compressed attack from the Magma Bull carried several times the power of normal flame attack.

Even now, the Magma Bull was still charging head-on. However, Yue literally received and returned the fired attack.

KABOOOOM!!

The space vibrated accompanied by an explosive sound, and the Magma Bull that stood on the magma was blown away by the attack. Blown backward by the impact, the Magma Bull struck the wall. However, "GRAAAAH!!," it only raised an angry shout and instantly stood up. This time, it began to once again charge with all of its might to repel the intruders.

"Hah… as expected, flame attack isn't effective on it."

"Well, it is cladded in magma… so it can't be helped."

Yue, who deflected the blazing flame shot back, raised a grunt. Laughing wryly, Hajime tried to take Donner, but Shia raised a hand.

"Hajime-san, please leave it to me!"

Although Hajime doubted Shia who already held Doryukken in her hands, she snorted in full spirit. His doubt turned into trust, and he expressed his acknowledgement with a wave of his hand. It was after he had guessed Shia wanted to test the new features installed in Doryukken when his magic eye saw Shia was supplying her magic power into Doryukken.

"Alright~! I am going to do it!," Shia raised a yell, and after few light steps, she jumped towards the Magma Bull who had moved several meters towards the party.

Rotating once in the mid-air and riding on the momentum, she swung down Doryukken towards the Magma Bull on the ground with such a perfect timing. Her aiming wasn't off, the Doryukken swung down directly hitting the Magma Bull's head. At that moment, ripples of faint blue-colored magic power spread around the center of the place where it struck, followed by tremendous impact. The Magma Bull's head popped, exploded.

Using the nailed down Doryukken as a fulcrum, Shia rotated again. She jumped over the sliding Magma Bull's body and splendidly landed on the other side.

"O-Ohh Hajime-san, I, the person who used it, now know that this new feature generated an amazing amount of force."

"Ah, looks like it… I've thought what kind of thing is this "Conversion : Impact," but this is good…"

Not only Hajime, Yue and Tio immediately raised words of praise towards the blow that Shia did with considerable force. It was thanks to the peculiar magic Hajime said, "Conversion : Impact."

This "Conversion : Impact" was a new peculiar magic Hajime acquired, a derivation from "Magic Power Conversion." The effect was just as the words expressed, it converted magic power into impact.

It was the ability of the horshead Hajime instantly turned into minced meat several days ago in«Orcus Great Dungeon». He had actually collected the meat in secret, and when he recovered the stake, he ate it.

If it was an average demonic beasts, neither the stats nor Hajime's the skill would increase, but he ate it since he thought it might have an effect because the horsehead was able to hold on against Kouki's party along with the Kouki in limit break… But as he thought, his stats didn't change at all; he only gained the horsehead's peculiar magic.

Then, he used Creation magic to add "Conversion : Impact" to an ore and installed it into the newly built Doryukken.

Hajime watched the Magma Bull's head blasted in interest, but he was urged by Yue to hurry.

Afterwards, the demonic beast variations increased as they descended the floors. There were bat-like demonic beasts that scattered magma from their wings, scorching red moray-like demonic beasts that jumped out from the wall it melted, hedgehog-like demonic beasts that shot out numerous needles of flame, chameleon-

like demonic beasts that only produced its face from within the magma and attacked using its magma-covered tongues like a whip while swimming on the gravity-defying magma river overhead, and there were even blazing serpents…

It was indeed troublesome since the demonic beasts' bodies were clad in magma or ablaze which nullified any half-assed magic, and some were using surprise attacks from the flowing magma rivers where they hid their body. The demonic beasts not only would try to inflict fatal wound by using body blow, a lot of them were also using the surrounding magma to attack; a situation where they have infinite weapon. Besides, they would run into the magma to ensure their safety.

It was indeed true that even if the adventurers were capable of breaking through the sandstorm, they wouldn't be able to descend further than seventh floor and return. Moreover, even if the demonic beasts could be defeated, the size and quality of the magic stones were the same as the demonic beasts in forties floors of «Orcus Great Dungeon» and the existence of Serene Stone, a valuable mineral, didn't affect the income much. So, it was understandable that no one want to challenge this dungeon.

Following that, the most troublesome thing was the heat gradually increasing.

"Haa, haa… it's hot."

"… Shia, you feel hot because you think it is. Those flowing thing is just water… See, it's cool now, fufu."

"Ah, Master! Yue is starting to break! The eyes hath became hollow!"

Other than Tio, Hajime's party were downed by the strong heat. For now, he took out air-conditioning type of artifacts… but it just like sprinkling water over dry soil. Their sweat flowed like an unstoppable waterfall. Seeing Yue and Shia whose consciousness began to become hazy, Hajime thought it was necessary for them to take a little rest while he wiped off the sweat on his chin.

When they reached a broad space, Hajime used "Transmutation" on a wall away from the magma and created a tunnel. He urged Yue and the others inside, and shut the entrance to the limit so the heat from magma would not reach them directly. Furthermore, he used "Mineral Separation" and "Compressed Transmutation" to coat the surface of the room's wall with solid material so they wouldn't be attacked by any moray-like or magma spout.

"Fuu… Yue, please create a block of ice. We will rest here for a while. If not, it would not be odd if we make a fatal mistake later."

"Nn… okay."

Although her eyes were hollow, Yue conjured ice magic and a huge block of ice appeared in the middle of the room. Though Tio didn't mind the heat, she made the wind blow with the block of ice as the core. Thanks to the wind created by Tio, the cold air from the block of ice instantly cooled down the room's temperature.

"Whaa~~, it's coool~, I can live on noww~."

"… Hmmmm~."

Collapsing in a girl's sitting pose, Yue and Shia narrowed their eyes in delight. The birth of squishy-Yue and squishy-Shia.

While thinking the two were moe, Hajime took out towels from "Treasure Box" and handed them over to everyone.

"Yue, Shia, it is good that you're enjoying yourselves, but wipe your sweat. Your movement will become duller if you get too cold."

"… Nn~."

"Roger~."

With elongated words, Yue and Shia slowly took the towel. Seeing them, Tio spoke to Hajime.

"Master, doth not relaxed thy guard yet, okay?"

"You, too. This heat is indeed dangerous. I must create better air-conditioning type artifact…"

"Hmm, for it to be capable of defeating master… This is probably this Great Dungeon's concept."

Rather than defeat, hot is hot, and Tio, who also wiping her sweat with towel, made Hajime doubtful with what she said.

"Concept?"

"Mhm. This one hath heard many things from Master, but there is the thing called trial, right? If this was to challenge the God… then, there should be various concepts it based on, or so this one thought. For example, the «Orcus Great Dungeon» that this one heard from Master hath a lot of demonic beasts, so various battle experiences would be gained as one advanced through. «Raisen Great Dungeon» nullified strong power called magic, polishing one's flexibility against any kind of attacks. This «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» probably uses the heat to obstruct one's

concentration and how one would react against the surprise attacks under this situation, right?"

"… Indeed… I never thought of it because in the end, I only needed to conquer it… but the trials are used by the Liberators to "teach" us, huh."

"I see," Hajime nodded at Tio's conjecture. She has deep knowledge even though she's a complete masochist, and the prudent Tio was normally could be thought as a beautiful, black-haired woman who exuded sensual and amorousness… so Hajime looked at her with a truly pitying gaze.

However, seeing Tio's sweat flowing from the scruff of her neck disappearing into the valley of her bountiful breasts, Hajime averted his gaze. His gaze turned towards the clothes of Yue and Shia sticky from all the sweat. Noticing the disappearance and appearance of their bare skin, his gaze was pulled towards Yue.

Probably because she was wiping her sweat, a large amount of her skin was peeping from her pure-white dress. Her skin had a tinge of red due to heat. Her bare skin glossy from the sweat and her rougher-than-normal breathing was truly erotic.

Unconsciously, Hajime even forgot to look away and continued watching her, but his gaze suddenly met Yue's raised gaze. Having forgotten the situation due to being charmed… and getting somewhat aroused, Hajime tried to look away in guilt.

However, just before he looked away, Yue who caught Hajime's gaze revealed a bewitching smile. With the still disarrayed clothes, arching her back like a cat, she slowly got down to all fours and approached Hajime. Her hazy eyes that wouldn't let Hajime's gaze escape, flushing cheeks because of heat, and showing a tint of breasts every time she moved…

Yue, who immediately approached Hajime in all fours, sat on Hajime's cross-legged legs, sending him an upward gaze, and with a spoiled, sweet tone…

"… Hajime, wipe me?"

Hajime unconsciously received the towel from her, and his gaze remained fixed on Yue's eyes. In his mind, "Ah, crap. I can't win against Yue in this situation," he thought with a wry smile. Quietly, he tried to glide his hand on the scruff of Yue's neck… but was stopped by Shia's protest.

"Y-O-U T-W-O! Please mind the time, place, and occasion a little! We are in a hurry and this is a Great Dungeon! Geez! Seriously, geez!"

"No, well, umm. It's not like I could help it, right? Yue is too erotic. So, I couldn't ignore her."

"… Hajime who was quietly staring was cute."

"Can't you two at least reflect a little? To begin with, why didn't Hajime-san look at me? Even though I was right beside Yue-san and in such condition, too… Gosh, my confident plummeted~. Hey, Tio-san should say something, too."

"Well, the two art infatuated with each other. So methinks it can't be helped, right? This one also wants Master to abuse one without minding the place… however, well, Master reacted a little to this one's breasts~. This one will be satisfied with just that this time. Kufufu."

It was the usual perverted remarks of Tio. However, Hajime was found out that he felt the sweat that flowed into Tio's breasts made her looked sexy. Hearing that, "I am not even looked at!," Shia was angry. Shia forgot about the TPO (time, place, and occasion) she said a little while ago and began to strip before Hajime. *Then, this one will strip too*, but Hajime fired rubber bullets to silence them because it would turn bothersome otherwise.

Hajime continued to wipe off Yue's sweat before the writhing Shia whose breasts was completely bare and the writhing Tio with her disgusting smile. Hajime sighed while secretly relieved that Kaori wasn't there.

Chapter 7 : The Last Trial is Easy?

«Guryuu-en Great Volcano» *probably* has fifty floors.

Since it was the current floor Hajime's party was in. The "probably" part was because the floor's situation was a little special. Frankly, they didn't understand anything about the current floor.

But more accurately, Hajime's party were currently on board a brown colored boulder, like a small boat, on the magma that was flowing like a big river, mid-air.

"It feels like Indiana-san in hard mode eh…" Hajime muttered while recalling the Earth's most famous and too aggressive Archeologist.

As for the reason why they were in this situation… truthfully, it was Hajime's mistake. Hajime's party had noticed the magma that continued to scorch them, was

sometimes making unnatural movement while they were searching for the Serene stone right before they completed the floor.

More accurately, the flow of the magma greatly changed even though there was nothing obstructing it before, or the current suddenly slowed, or there was only a part of magma flowing in the air, and it overflowed, thus the magma dripped below.

However, those happened on the magma away from the passage, so they didn't worry about it because it would not disturb them from conquering the floor. However, Hajime by chance used "Mineral Enquiry" to the surrounding and found out that the cause of the magma's unnatural movement was "Serene Stone." It seemed the magic power inside the magma was calmed by "Serene Stone," similar to obstructing the magma flow.

Hajime's party then thought that the place where the magma's movement was strongly obstructed would have a large amount of "Serene Stone." Thus they searched for it and they indeed discovered a large amount of "Serene Stone" buried in that place. While noting the magma's movement, Hajime's party collected a considerable amount of "Serene Stone." Afterwards, they came to a certain location while thinking there would be much stone in reserve.

It was a place enclosed by the magma flowing in mid-air like a huge wall. Hajime transmuted a stair to approach it and came to know that a large amount of "Serene Stone" was buried there when he used "Mineral Enquiry."

Immediately, Hajime used "Mineral Separation" to only collect "Serene Stone," but he was careless because he kept collecting "Serene Stone" due to lack of concentration from the heat. He didn't put much attention to the surrounding wall of magma.

Hajime noticed this mistake when he stored the "Serene stone" into "Treasure Box." It was because magma spouted with tremendous momentum from the wall the moment the effect of "Serene Stone" had disappeared.

Hajime immediately jumped back, but the magma was spouting with tremendous power just like water gushing out from the cracked and thus collapsed dam. The hole from where it spouted expanded and more rushed out.

The overly tremendous momentum of the magma made the surrounding immediately filled with magma. Hajime used transmutation to create a small boat before Yue's barrier was broken, and the party boarded it. The small boat was immediately heated up by the magma, but there was no problem since Hajime had strengthened the boat using "Strength Endowment" derived from "Vajra."

Following that, they continued to drift along the flow of the magma and was flowing mid-air before they were aware of it. They flowed into the depth of «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» using different route from the stairs. Flowing as they felt the scorching heat from the streaming magma, and ended up where they were currently at.

By the way, normally they would've stopped on the riverbed when they were about to ride on the magma's sky road, but Shia used "Effect Endowment" of gravity magic to reduce the boat's weight, and thus they were able to get on the magma. "Effect Endowment" made it possible to adjust the weight of the thing Shia touched as if it were her own.

"Ah, Hajime-san. There's another tunnel."

"We art almost at the level of the foot of this mountain. Be prepared, okay?"

Seeing the direction Shia pointed at, Hajime's party was would indeed continue to flow into a big hole on the wall along with the magma. They understood the magma was continuing to flow downward. Until now, they've entered a tunnel every time they descent a floor, it might be a shortcut if compared to normally using the stair.

While nodding at Tio's advice, Hajime's party drifted into the tunnel. The magma's sky road was continuing in the middle of the big tunnel like a snake. After the magma's sky road was going lower, it suddenly cut off right after a curve. No, more accurately, it was a sudden downward slope similar to a waterfall.

"Again… everyone, don't get shaken off!"

Yue and the girls nodded at Hajime's words and they either clung to the edge of the small boat or Hajime's waist. After feeling the anxiousness similar to when the climbing jet coaster about to go down from the first falling point, Hajime's party's boat finally fell.

Fwiish Swiish

Sound of wind entered their ears. Shia used gravity magic to shift the weight while Tio controlled the wind as they descend on the rapid magma. The magma's speed increased by times as if it didn't have any viscosity.

Transmuting spikes on his shoes to fix his posture, Hajime cautiously watched over the surroundings. After all, usually at such time…

"Tch, they come after all."

Clicking his tongue, he pulled out Donner at the same time, and Hajime unhesitatingly pulled the trigger. Explosive sound resounded. It rang out three times accompanied with three flashes that cut through the air without deviating and destroyed the targets. The ones that came attacking Hajime's party were the bat-type monsters that scattered magma from their wings.

These Magma Bats were not much of a threat alone. They only have considerable speed and capable of scattering magma like flame bullets. They were only small fries to Hajime's party.

However, the troublesome point about Magma Bats was they attacked in group. Thirty more could be found if one was seen, just like Black G demonic beasts, appearing from the crack of the boulder wall.

Even now, although Hajime instant-killed three Magma Bats, as expected, they could hear sound of a large amount of fluttering wings amidst the wind coming from the rapid descent.

"… Hajime, leave the left and behind to me."

"Ah, I will leave it to you. Shia, Tio, you control the boat."

"Roger!"

"Mhm, leave it to this one. How about ass spanking as a reward?"

Ignoring Tio's perverted remark that could neither be taken as joke nor real, Hajime and Yue were back to back diagonally on the boat. Then, crowd of Magma Bats could be seen.

It was not an exaggeration to call them as one living creature. The numerous Magma Bats were moving as one big mass, like a group perfectly ordered birds. Their appearance was just like a dragon if seen from the side. It might be more accurate to call it a fire dragon because each of its wings was cladded in blazing magma.

The mass of Magma Bats approaching Hajime's party divided into two on their way, creating pincer attack from the front and behind. No matter how weak they were alone, the numerous them were moving as one huge creature and normally would overwhelm anyone with their number.

However, the party here were a group of cheat-like individuals. The demonic beasts that became fertilizer on the ground near the town of Ul were the proof the party wouldn't be so weak being overwhelmed by just number.

Hajime took out Metzelei from "Treasure Box," set it beside his waist and pulled the monster's trigger.

BAAANNNG

With the ringing of the peculiar shooting sound, the storm of death exhibited its undoubtable might and one rapid fire pierced through various targets. The bullets crushed the wall of the cave in the distance while the Magma Bats were killed and fell into the ground without being able to resist.

Furthermore, Hajime took out Orkan using the other free hand, placed it on his shoulder, and mercilessly fired it. Spark created, and the rockets flew and pierced into the middle of Magma Bats who were grouping due to Metzelei's barrage, scattering violent impacts along with roaring sounds.

The result was clear. The crowd of Magma Bats were crushed and falling just like a short squall.

Similar thing happened to the Magma Bats attacking from the rear.

""Storm Dragon.""

Yue's right hand thrust straight, and the moment she muttered that, a green sphere of wind was created. Following that, the sphere transformed, forming a dragon in less than no time. The wind dragon, who was a compilation of green-colored wind and called "Storm Dragon," glared at the crowd of Magma Bats once, and it opened its jaws, moving to devour its preys.

Naturally, the Magma Bats shot flame bullets towards "Storm Dragon," then they divided into two again to dodge the dragon. However, all of Yue's "dragons" were a compound of gravity magic and other element. Naturally, "Storm Dragon" was not just composed of normal wind; it was composed of wind blades that were pulled by gravity to create a dragon. Once it moved, it would be difficult for the prey to escape.

Magma Bats, just like the other demonic beasts that became the food of "Thunder Dragon" and "Azure Dragon," couldn't resist from being pulled towards "Storm Dragon." Thus the body cladded by wind blades cut the demonic beasts' bodies to pieces, scattering flesh and blood. It should be noted that the reasons Yue didn't use "Thunder Dragon" or "Azure Dragon" was because the Magma Bats were strong against heat and Yue judged it was enough to just cut their wings.

In the end, "Storm Dragon" came within the crowd and released the million wind blades formed its body in all direction, completely annihilating the Magma Bats.

“Um~, Master and Yue’s annihilating force art fearful no matter how many times I has’t seen i.”

“Indeed~.”

While controlling the boat on the rapid current, Tio and Shia were praising them with awkward feeling. Shrugging his shoulders as he put out Metzelei and Orkan into “Treasure Box,” Hajime lightly touched the Yue’s cheek with his chest then returned to look at the front. Yue, after narrowing her eyes in happiness from being touched, returned to look at the surrounding with caution.

Hajme and Yue who casually took the chance to flirt made Shia exuded aura that expressed, *Shia is lonely! Hold me!*, which Tio took advantage of. Making slightly troubled expression after thinking it couldn’t be helped, Hajime lightly stroked Shia’s rabbit ear then pinched Tio’s cheek. Hajime was troubled such things could make the two raised joyed expressions.

Hajime’s party were considerably composed even though they were attacked by demonic beasts as they descended the rapid, magma’s sky road. However, as if to take down their composure, the descending magma up until now suddenly began to ascend.

After climbing several tens of meters with tremendous speed, they could see light ahead of them. It was the exit of the tunnel. However, the problematic thing was the magma was cut off for real this time.

“Hold on tight!”

With Hajime’s command, Yue and the girls once again clung to the small boat. Having ridden on the magma rapid’s speed, the small boat was thrown outside with tremendous momentum.

While having his dantian attacked by the feeling of being in mid-air, Hajime quickly confirmed the condition of the surrounding. The space Hajime’s party falling into was similar to the room where the last trial of «Raisen Great Dungeon» took place; a vast space.

However, it wasn’t spherical like the room in «Raisen Great Dungeon». It has distorted shape which made it impossible to completely understand how vast the space was, but it was at least more than three kilometers. Almost all part of the ground was filled with magma, but the boulders appeared in some places and created footholds. On the surrounding walls were protruding places and conversely, there were also shaved off places. In the air was as expected, numerous rivers of intersecting magmas, and disappearing below, into the ocean of magma.

Flare-like pillars of fire spouted from the boiling, scorching ocean. If there was something called boiler of hell, it must be looked like this. That was the impression Hajime's party got.

However, the most noticeable thing was the small island in the center of the ocean of magma. The island was raised around 10 meters above the magma's surface, an island or rock. If it was only that, then it would just become a foothold big enough for them, but the island was covered by dome of magma. The spherical magma was just like a small version of sun, but the thing in the middle of the island was enough to catch the attention of Hajime's party.

""O' wind.""

The small boat turned over by the momentum was fixed by Tio in the air, then each of them returned to their own duty as they once again boarded the small boat. Yue used "Soar" to adjust the boat's falling speed. The boat softly landed on the ocean of magma, and the party maximized their vigilance because this place was obviously different from the ones they had seen.

"… Is that the dwelling?"

Yue muttered as she took a look at the middle of the magma-domed island.

"From the depth, I think it is okay to think so… but, if it really is…"

"There should be the last guardian of some sort… right, Master?"

"We used something similar to shortcut, so is it too farfetched to say we have passed the test, Hajime-san?"

Hajime's thought was confirmed by Tio, who was looking at the surrounding with sharp gaze, made her not to be thought as a perverted masochist if some small accidents were overlooked. Even seeing their tightened expression, Shia muttered optimist words while looking at a certain direction.

Tracing Shia's gaze, Hajime could see a staircase beyond the large foothold. The staircase continued into the wall made him think that perhaps they would've come from that staircase if they used the proper route.

Even so, no matter how impossible it was for someone to use magma's sky road, it was too much of an optimist to think the shortcut even passed through the last trial room. *It'd be nice if it really is~*, Shia said, but her cautious look expressed that even she couldn't believe that.

It was correct for them to be cautious because immediately, bullet-like magma shot out from the magma flowing in the air.

“Hmph, leave it to this one!”

Tio shouted as she activated her magic, thus masses of flame shot out from the ocean of magma, countering magma approaching from above.

However, that attack was only the beginning signal. Immediately after Tio countered the incoming blazing masses and scattered them, more blazing masses were shot out from the ocean of magma like a machinegun.

“Tch, scatter!”

Judging they would only be a target on their current place, the small boat, Hajime told the other to scatter as he jumped towards the nearby foothold, abandoning the small boat. The numerous blazing masses crushed the small boat where Hajime’s party were before, thus it sunk into the ocean of magma.

With each of them in different foothold, Hajime’s party intercepted the incoming blazing masses. Though they easily intercepted those, Hajime’s party were irritated because it didn’t seem to ever end. They were also irritated the heat coming from the ocean of magma that the distorted air.

To break from this situation, at the same time Hajime finished reloading Donner-Schlag using gunspin, and aimed Schlag muzzle over his shoulder without turning around. Thus the elbow of his artificial arm was faced forward and fired to intercept the masses of magma in front, while Schlag rapid-fired to shoot down the masses of magma approaching Yue behind him.

His intention was completely read by Yue without a word. She immediately activated gravity magic using this chance.

“”Absolute Calamity.””

At the same time the name rang out, a black, swirling sphere appeared in the middle of Hajime’s party, pulling the incoming masses of magma one after another. The black, small star swallowed everything and used its supergravity to compress them.

With the room between the barrage of magma masses by Yue’s magic, Hajime used “Aerodynamic” to jump into the air, trying to reach the magma-domed middle island.

The most troublesome thing about the barrage that attacked Hajime's party was the endlessness. This place was obviously the last trial of «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», but because there's no visible enemy unlike the other dungeons he had been in, he didn't know what to do to clear it. As such, Hajime thought of getting on the suspicious island.

While running in the air towards the middle island, Hajime used "Telepathy."

"I am going to look around the middle island. Cover me."

"Roger."

The masses of magma outside of the range of Yue's "Absolute Calamity" came to attack Hajime, but Tio intercepted those using numerous flame bullets from the ocean of magma. Shia didn't expand Doryukken and used its shotgun mode to intercept. Yue, while maintaining "Absolute Calamity," also intercept using numerous flame bullets from ocean of magma just like Tio.

With covering from Yue and the girls, Hajime approached straight towards the middle island, and he was about to do the last jump using "Aerodynamic."

However, at that moment,

"ROOOOOOOOOOAAAAAR!!!"

"Kh!?"

Hearing the bellowing, majestic roar, a gigantic serpent came to attack from right under Hajime who was in mid-air with its opened mouth.

Maybe because its whole body was clad in magma, neither heat perception nor sign perception noticed it in this place filled with magma. Moreover, the ocean magma itself was filled with magic power so magic power perception also didn't notice it, so the gigantic Magma Serpent was able to completely make a surprise attack.

However, Hajime twisted his body using his superhuman reflex and was barely able to evade the mouth.

In the place Hajime was before, *crunch*, the Magma Serpent chomped and passed through. Hajime flipped his body in mid-air just like a cat, aimed the muzzles at the passing Magma Serpent's head and fired. The flash with certain killing destructiveness didn't miss its mark and hit the Magma Serpent's head, blowing it away.

"What !?"

However, the raised voice was not the Magma Serpent's death throes, but Hajime's astonished voice.

Naturally, the cause was the Magma Serpent. After all, the Magma Serpent's head was certainly hit and burst, but the thing scattered was only magma, none of the inside matter. He had seen demonic beasts cladded in magma in «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», but they were only wearing the magma, and had their own flesh. None was composed of only magma.

Hajime immediately recovered and tried to shoot the other parts of the creature to experiment. Numerous flashes mercilessly penetrated the Magma Serpent's body, but as he thought, there's no flesh at all. This Magma Serpent seemed to be composed of only Magma.

Though surprised, Hajime had immobilized the Magma Serpent for now by blowing all over of its body, so he once again jumped towards the middle island using "Aerodynamic", passing by the serpent's side.

However, the Magma Serpent's attack hasn't ended yet. At the moment Hajime passed through its side, it suddenly hurled its body towards Hajime even though it had lost its head and parts of its body.

Hajime made the shotshell in his artificial arm burst and barely succeeded to evade using its recoil. And at this time, a chill ran down Hajime's spine. Following his instinct, Hajime burst out the shotshells in succession immediately and used "Aerodynamic" to withdraw from there in high speed.

One attack after another, the Magma Serpents came out of the ocean of magma, chasing after Hajime's track. Those huge mouths *crunch, crunch*, chomped.

Retreating while rotating in the air, Hajime landed on a nearby foothold. Yue and the girls came to his side. The barrage of blazing masses temporarily stopped.

"… Hajime, are you unhurt?"

"Ah, no problem. More importantly, the real things finally appear."

Yue, who was worried about his safety, touched his arm. Hajime returned her touch, and answered without looking away from the front. *Fwuush* With each sound, Magma Serpents appeared one after another before Hajime.

"As expected, that middle island is the last stop. Well thee seemth to say defeat us if thou want to pass."

"But, the one Hajime-san shot before regenerated, you know? Are they beatable?"

Around 20 Magma Serpents appeared, glaring at Hajime's party. Even the Magma Serpent that received gunfires from Hajime before had already restored to its former appearance as if nothing had happened.

Shia was frowning as she pointed that out. At Raisen Great Dungeon, she was confused by the regenerating knights, but now she was calmly thinking on how to pass this. It was shown by how her rabbit ears were restlessly moving about. Wryly smiling at Shia who became quite courageous, Hajime told them his guess.

"It might be similar to the Vachram from before, having a core, a magic stone, to form the magma body. Though my magic eye cannot specify the location because the obstruction from the magma… there's nothing else but to destroy the core."

Everyone nodded at Hajime's words and they simultaneously attacked the 20 Magma Serpents.

The Magma Serpents rose like the solar flare shot out masses of flame from their mouth as they tensed. The twenty attacked from all direction. Normally, one would be swallowed by the numerous masses of magma without being able to escape.

"It hath been a long time since this one used this attack! So, taste all of it!"

A huge amount of black magic power appeared before Tio's thrust her hands out. It then compressed in less than no time, and fired in the next moment. It was the Ryuujin tribe's Breath.

Thus the black flash, whose dreadful power forced Hajime to defend with all of his might, eliminated all of the Magma Serpents in front of Tio without any trace left. Furthermore, she swung it as if it was a black colored flash blade and annihilated other Magma Serpents.

Immediately, eight Magma Serpents were annihilated, thus Hajime's party dashed out from the hole of the encirclement.

As expected, by annihilating them without leaving a trace, the magic stone would also be annihilated no matter where the location was, but it was the Great Dungeon's quality to not make it that easy.

The 12 remaining Magma Serpents instantly crushed the foothold where Hajime's party were before, falling into the ocean of magma and disappeared, but their numbers went back up to 20 the next time they re-appeared.

"Oi oi, I've confirmed the disappearance of the magic stones, you know? Was defeating it not the condition to clear this trial?"

Hajime's expression distorted from the doubt. Hajime had activated "Light Speed" at the time Tio's breath was about to reach the Magma Serpent and he confirmed the moment when the magic stone inside Magma Serpent was annihilated by the Breath using his increased kinetic vision.

Hajime came to doubt the condition for conquering this dungeon, and Shia raised her voice while pointing at the middle island.

"Hajime-san! Look at that! The wall is shining!"

"What?"

When he looked at the middle island, it was indeed as Shia said. A part of the rockwall shot light as big as a fist. He didn't notice it up until now, but the orange-colored light was coming from some kind of crystal buried under the wall of rock.

Hajime used "Farsight" to confirm it, but although it was difficult to confirm due to camouflage, he understood a large amount of similar crystals were buried on the rockwall of the middle island in orderly fashion. The middle island was cylindrical, so considering the interval between crystals and the island's surface area, around 100 crystals were buried. And the crystals that currently shooting out light were eight… the same number of Magma Serpents Tio annihilated before.

"I see… so we need to defeat a hundred of these Magma Serpents to clear it, huh."
"… In this heat, fighting a hundred of them… it matched the dungeon's concept."

Needless to say, having suffered from the heat and surprise attacks, the challengers were driven into the situation where they needed to concentrate the most in the very end; nastiness suitable for a Great Dungeon.

Indeed, even Hajime's party were quite exhausted, mentally. However, their expressions didn't show any exhaustion, they were wearing fearless smile because they had found out the method to conquer the dungeon.

They regained their spirit when they came to understand what they must do, and they once again attacked the Magma Serpents. Along with the downpouring masses

of magma, the Magma Serpents made irregular movements to catch and burn their prey.

Hajime's party spread out again and respectively began to counterattack.

With dragon wings grown out of her back, Tio floated using the wind she regenerated and used tornado along with vacuum blades to attack, bombarding the serpent. It was a wind element, mid-ranked offensive magic, "Imperial Cannon."

"This is the ninth! Presently, this one is leading, Master! If this one defeated the most of them then this one wants a lot of rewards (punishments)! Of course, only two of us at night!"

Tio shouted while slashing the ninth Magma Serpents to pieces. Hajime tried to refuse with an amazed expression, but Shia interrupted him.

"Wha-! It's unfair if it's only Tio-san! I am also entering this challenge! Hajime-san, one night with me if I win!"

After shouting, Shia jumped above a Magma Serpent and swung down Doryukken onto its head from upper-stance. At the moment of impact, ripple of light blue colored magic power spread, next a violent impact was generated. The serpent immediately exploded from the head part until the ocean of magma. Sparkling minerals fluttered from the remains of Magma Serpent. It was the magic stone crushed by the impact from "Magic Shockwave".

Masses of magma were approaching Shia, who was still mid-air from killing one of Magma Serpent, from behind. Shia used the recoil from Doryukken's outburst and evaded. However, as if it was aiming for this, a Magma Serpents with its mouth opened come attacking to where Shia would fall.

However, Shia wasn't that worried about it, she threw a disk taken out from the holster on her back into the air. It was a disk with diameter of 30 centimeters, and it didn't fall but floated slightly lower place than Shia. Shia put her foot on it weightlessly and once again danced in the air.

The disk used the same principle as Cross Bit to float in the air, becoming foothold, and moving according Shia's will by using induction stone. This, coupled with Shia's weight adjustment, made it possible to do a combat like "dancing in the air".

With its calculation coming off, the Magma Snake passed through the empty space under Shia. Transforming Doryukken, Shia aimed the muzzle towards the serpent and pulled the trigger. What shot out wasn't the usual bullet but a slug bullet.

However, it wasn't a normal slug bullet. It was a bullet created from special ore that Hajime endowed with characteristic of "Magic Shockwave," thus it would generate shock wave from the supplied magic power at the same time it hit the target. By force alone, it far surpassed the grenade bullet.

Along with the roar of Doryukken, the fired slug bullet didn't miss its target while hitting the Magma Serpent from back of its head, thus from its head to its body, the Magma Serpent was swallowed by the regenerated explosion. That impact once again crushed the magic stone which now fluttered as it sparkled in the air.

"Oi, girls. You, don't just selfishly…"

"… Then, I want one day of date for the two of us."

Hajime opened his mouth to retort on Tio and Shia's one-sided competition, but he was interrupted by Yue who also wanted to participate in the competition of annihilation. Putting aside the things at night, the increasing number of companions decreased their time alone, so Yue seemed to want a one full day of just the two.

Exuding aura of having fun, however, the magic Yue activated was a brutal one. It was her latest favorite, "Thunder Dragon."

However, due to her being more and more skillful on using it, the "Thunder Dragon" that appeared was numbered seven. At almost the same time, they moved toward their respective targets. Thundering roars rang out. The Magma Serpents who were trying to devour Yue was conversely devoured one after another by the group of Thunder Dragons without even leaving a mass of magma behind, so their magic stone inside their body had also broken.

Seeing that spectacle, Shia said, "As I thought, the most powerful enemy is Yue-san~!" Tio said, "Yue is bugged! Twas absolutely odd!" Both of them made hasty expressions while cursing. They pull out more severe attacks, adding the number of things they annihilated.

"… It's not like I care. But, they seem to having fun."

Shrugging his shoulders towards the three enthusiastic girls that made him as the prize of the competition, Hajime somewhat given up. Then, without turning around, he rapidly fired Schlag over his shoulder towards the incoming Magma Serpent behind him.

The bullets were fired evenly on the Magma Serpent's body and the impacts blown the serpent's body. At the same time, the impacts made the magic stone fluttered in the air. Repelling the masses of magma that flew from the previous half body,

Hajime pinpoint shot through the falling magic stone right before it fell into the ocean of magma.

The bullet Hajime fired from Schlag was the similar exploding bullet like Shia's. However, because it would be problematic if the bullets were too big, their power didn't reach slug bullet's. Of course if he used Schlagen, then it would be possible to bring out that much of a destructive power. However, it was the first time the bullets were used, similar to an experiment, so he only used the two guns.

The normal sized bullet didn't have the power to blow away the Magma Serpent along with its magic stone, so Hajime now used around 2 shots to blown off the magma armor and sniped the exposed magic stone using Donner's pinpoint attack. Naturally, the Schlagen was capable of ignoring the magma armor and penetrate through the magic stone, but it had too much penetrative power added that it wasn't easy to locate the magic stone thus wasn't suitable for aiming at the magic stone.

Now, another two Magma Serpents were attacking Hajime from his right and left, but he withdrew in high speed using "Aerodynamic" and "Ground Shrinker." He flipped mid-air and fired Schlag in inverted pose.

BOOOOM!

One explosive sound rang out. However, the fired masses of killing intent were four. The Magma Serpents, who were attacking from right and left with tremendous momentum didn't have any chance to be confused from the suddenly disappearing prey. They were attacked by the impact coming from above thus had its magma bodies dispersed, exposing the core, the magic stone.

At the same time, two flashes of light were fired from Donner and shot through the two magic stone without even one millimeter of error.

If one looked, the crystals regularly buried on the outer circumference of the rockwall of the middle island mostly emitted light, only eight haven't. That was done even though not that much time passed since the real fight begun.

If Hajime's party's guess, where «Guryuu-en Great Volcano»'s concept was for a prolonged battle while having one's concentration down due to nasty environment, was right, then the expectation of the creator of this trial could be said as completely off the mark because they were Hajime and his party.

Tio's Breath destroyed more Magma Serpents

— Six left.

Shia used a blow from Doryukken and at the same time fired the slug bullet into another Magma Serpent, blasting them.

— Four left.

Two Magma Serpent were trying to do a pincer attack on Yue, ambushing from below where the ocean of magma. However, above them was “Thunder Dragon” coiling around Yue, obstructing them thus it became a standstill. Following that, the two Magma Serpents were now attacked by four “Thunder Dragons” from both of their sides, and were devoured.

— Two left.

A Magma Serpent was rapidly charging at Hajime while scattering bullet-like masses of magma. However, Hajime was swaying like a dancing falling leaf and avoided the masses of magma. When he was about to be devoured by the Magma Serpent, he fired Schlag and they passed through each other. The serpent blown away while the inertia made the magic stone jumped out which then sniped by Donner and Hajime didn’t even need to look at it.

Finally, the last Magma Serpent was surprise attacking from the ocean of magma below. Hajime flew up using “Aerodynamic” and fired Schlag, towards the interior of the opened mouth of Magma Serpent coming from below.

At the moment of impact, red shockwave scattered the magma. The gap created slightly revealed the magic stone. Hajime poised the Donner in his right hand. When he was about to fire the last attack, he watched Yue and the girl’s satisfied looks.

“This is the end.”

Looking at it in the edge of his vision, Hajime fired the last attack for the sake of conquering «Guryuu-en Great Volcano».

— And at that moment.

FUUUUWIIIIIISHHHHH

A beam poured down from above.

The light looked like divine punishment shot from the heaven, was the light that mortally injured Hajime before. No, it might be far stronger than that. The attack even made the air screamed was fired, aiming at the time of battle where Hajime most wide opened — swallowing Hajime along with the last Magma Serpent.

Chapter 8 : The User of Age of Gods Magic

Without any warning, the white beam suddenly shot down from the heavens.

The light attacked Hajime with a perfect timing; when he was about to finish the last Magma Serpent. Thus, Hajime was swallowed by a destructive storm carrying fierce heat and impact.

“Ha-Hajimee!!!”

Yue’s scream rang out. Slightly away from Hajime, Shia and Tio could only watched Hajime being swallowed by the beam absentmindedly, only to regain their senses when they heard Yue’s sorrowful scream they never heard even once ever since they met.

Pouring down from right above Hajime, the beam also swallowed the last Magma Serpent and reached the scorching sea, grandly blowing away the surrounding away, and temporarily disclosing the bottom of the magma sea. The beam kept piercing the sea of magma for a while, but gradually became thinner and thinner before finally disappearing as if merging with the air.

Yue, who frantically jumped to where Hajime was, Hajime appeared from the disappearing light and was floating in the air, even though he had become tattered. However, having crossed his arms to protect his chest and face, Hajime immediately lost his balance and began to fall towards the rampaging sea of magma because of the beam’s impact.

“Kh! “Soar”!”

Thinking Hajime had lost his consciousness; Yue used magic to stop Hajime from falling on his back. Using this chance, she hugged Hajime and they landed in the nearby foothold.

“Kh! Hajime! Hajime!”

Maximum uneasiness could be seen on Yue’s face while she made Hajime drink the holy water she took out. Hajime’s condition was quite miserable. His right arm was burnt so badly that even the bone could be seen, while his artificial arm half melted. His eyepatch was blown off and blood kept flowing from the deep wound on his cheek. Furthermore, his abdomen was burnt black, carbonized. Even so, as a proof of his growth, his internal organs weren’t damaged.

At that time, in the moment the beam was about to swallow Hajime, he twisted his body to face the beam by a hair-breadth and used “Concentrated Strengthening” and “Strength Endowment,” derivations from “Vajra.” Thanks to that, his head was defended by the reinforced artificial arm while his heart and lungs were protected by his right arm and Donner. The clothing around his belly, made from a special demonic beast’s leather, had its defense raised further by “Strength Endowment,” Hajime himself had an abnormal magic resistance, so there was no danger to his life but…

“Nh… recovery is too slow!”

Apparent with Yue irritated mutter, the recovery using holy water didn’t advanced much. Thus, Yue gritted her teeth.

Previously, Hajime had been burnt and collapsed after receiving the beam attack to protect Yue during the fight against the hydra in «Orcus Great Dungeon»’s last trial. Thus, Yue didn’t want to see it again, and she vowed to never let Hajime experienced such a thing again. However, the spectacle of Hajime being swallowed by the beam and collapsed powerlessly was just like the reproduction of that time. It made Yue’s normally expressionless face warped from regret.

And at that moment,

“Fools! Above thee!!”

Tio warned and at the same time, numerous flashes poured down. These were small version of the beam. Each had the power and scale of a tenth of the previous beam, but each of light of death could surely destroy one’s body.

However, Yue hadn’t notice the incoming flashes above because she was occupied with making Hajime drink the second vial of holy water. It was a situation where Yue’s magic wouldn’t make it in time since she had only looked up now because of the warning. In another three seconds, no, one second… between the time it felt like it enlarged, Yue desperately constructed a defense magic in her head.

“Won’t let thee! “Tempest Void”!”

Tio let Yue earned another few seconds. “Tempest Void,” was a mid-ranked defense magic of wind element. The wall of compressed air received the rain of death. The barrier of wind bent greatly at the moment of impact. Normally, the attack would bounce back, but there was no chance to do that. The mini-beams hitting one after another made the air shrieked. The time it could be intercepted was truly only a few seconds.

However, that was enough.

“”Divine Interruption”!”

Yue’s defense magic activated. Normally, she would use “Absolute Calamity,” but the time shortened to activate it wasn’t much even though she had become more skilled in using it. It was because the time to construct and activate gravity magic couldn’t be compared to magic of other attributes. Thus she decided to use “Divine Interruption,” the best defense magic she could immediately activate.

Barrier of light that shone brilliantly appeared before Yue’s thrust out hand, covering Yue and the unconscious Hajime in semi-sphere. In addition, the “Tempest Void” activated by Tio was finally unable to endure the storm of mini-beams, and collapsed accompanied by sound of air being ripped. At the same time, the non-declining torrent of destruction poured into the barrier of light below it.

WOOOOOOSSSHHHH!!!

The huge waterfall-like pressure didn’t annihilate Hajime and Yue, but it continued to attack them. Yue’s “Divine Interruption” cracked. Judging it would be bad after receiving more force than she imagined, Yue transformed the all-covering barrier into a shield that only covered overhead in the middle of its activation. The strength increased conversely to the range it covered.

The surroundings were destroyed by the mini-beams and parts of the foothold other than where Yue and Hajime were, already sunk into the sea of magma.

These mini-beams stubbornly aimed at Hajime, they didn’t even pouring at the nearby footholds where Shia and Tio were to halt them. However, Shia and Tio were forced to stay where they were because the power and density of barrage from the mini-beams were that abnormal.

“Hajime-san! Hajime-saan!”

“Calm down, Shia! Thou willth die if thou come out of this one’s protection!”

“But! Hajime-san is-!”

Tio frantically admonished Shia, who tried to dash into the downpour of mini-beams with tearful look while she moved the shield of swirling wind.

Tio was also worried about Hajime. She understood how painful it was for Shia. However, they mustn’t defenselessly charge into the minimized version of the attack that had severely injured Hajime, and had an effect of weakening the recovery rate

of holy water. Gripping Shia by the scruff of her neck, Tio desperately averted the threatening lights.

After ten seconds or maybe one minute… the storm of beams that seemed to continue through the eternity, poured down particularly intense, and the end finally could be seen. The surroundings were in miserable condition, and white smokes were rising here and there.

Yue and Tio had used up their magic power. Panting, they refilled their magic power using the magic power stocked inside Magic-Crystallization stones.

And at the same time, a man's voice that was half-amazed and half-admiring descended from the sky.

"… A force that cannot be overlooked; indeed it was the right thing to ambush here. You are all too dangerous. Especially, that man…"

Yue and the girls looked up towards the ceiling where the voice came from. Following that, their eyes opened wide in astonishment. As for the reason, several dragons and a pure white, gigantic dragon that couldn't be compared to the rest were flying, and there was a red-haired, black-skinned, slightly pointed ear, a man from Demon race on the white dragon's back.

"For the Breath of my white dragon to be incapable of killing him… and in addition, he had strong unknown weapons not written in the report… these women, too. It is truly unbelievable for you to not be finished with a barrage of 50 Ash Dragons. You, just what are you? Just how many Age of Gods magic do you have?"

The man was glaring from the sky with his dangerously narrowed golden eyes, similar to Tio's. He asked that question while being cautious of Yue and the others who glared back at him. He thought Yue and the girls' power came from Age of Gods magic from the Great Dungeons.

"Before questioning, how about you introduce yourself first? Does the Demon race have no manners?"

The one who answered the Demon race man was the previously unconscious Hajime. The Demon race man frowned. However, Yue and the girls' voice rang out before the man even opened his mouth.

"Hajime!"

"Hajime-san!"

"Art thou okay!? Master!?"

Hajime somehow managed to raise his upper body, but he once again fell because his injury was indeed severe. Yue promptly supported him while Shia and Tio jumped from the nearby foothold to where Hajime was, worried.

Hajime smiled to tell Yue and the girls, who were worriedly looking at him, that he was alright, and stood up by himself. However, he wasn't in a condition where he would be able to immediately fight. This was displayed by his forehead drenched in sweat due to sharp pains he felt. Even so, Hajime moved his gaze from Yue and the girls towards the Demon race in the sky, and was showing a fearless smile.

"… There's no need to introduce myself to those who will die soon."

"Same here. I am asking just because it was normal to ask. I am not interested either, so don't mind it. By the way, how's your friend's arm?"

Hajime asked as if to ridicule to stall for time for his recovery. The Demon race man had said "report" and "ambush," so Hajime recalled the Demon race who was behind the scene inside the town of Ul, whose arm blown off and got away with his life. Thus, his information might have come from there.

With his eyebrow twitching for an instant, the Demon race man answered with tone somewhat lowered than before.

"I change my mind. Bury this name of mine into your flesh and bones. My name is Freed Baghuar. A God's Apostle who will give divine punishment to the heretics."

"God's Apostle… I see. How exaggerated. Were you allowed to introduce yourself as that because you obtain the Age of Gods magic? It wasn't the kind of magic that control the demonic beasts, right? …Although the demonic beasts fired the beams, they seemed to do it at their own discretion. So, it must be a magic that created demonic beast, right? Of course, those who can create a matchless army can introduce themselves as God's Apostle, heh."

"That's right. For "Alv-sama," who had obtained God's powers, told to me directly, "My apostle." Therefore, all of my being is devoted to realize my master's wish. Thus, I will use my all to deny you, whose existences will only be an obstacle."

Closely resembling Ishtal of Church of the Saints, the Demon race man, Freed Baghuar, was denying the existences of Hajime's party up front. However, Hajime fearlessly laughed with fierce denial. Though his recovery rate was slow, Hajime had used "Recovery" derived from "Magic Conversion" to change his magic power into recovery, and his bleeding had stopped. Though he could not use his left arm, it was

possible for him to use his unbroken right arm even if the bone could be seen. Hajime psyched, "I can still fight!"

"That's my line. Those who obstruct me are enemies. And I will… kill my enemies!"

After shouting so, Hajime endured the sharp pain to aim Donner at Freed and pulled the trigger. He held down his screaming right arm and body due to recoil, and used killing intent aimed at his enemies. Furthermore, he activated "Light Speed" and took out Cross Bits to attack. At the same time, Yue's "Thunder Dragon", Tio's Breath, and Shia's exploding-slug bullet fired.

However, when several of the 3-4 meters long Ash Dragons entered the attack trajectories, numerous piled up, triangular, reddish black barriers immediately appeared and received all of the attacks from Hajime's party.

The barrier that received the force of Hajime's party's attack and didn't even held on for a few seconds before it cracked, but more Ash Dragons came from behind and piled up another similar barriers, and thus it wasn't possible to break through. When they looked carefully, there were turtle-shaped demonic beasts on the dragons' back. Their shells were shining in reddish black, so these turtle-shaped demonic beasts were most likely the ones that activated the barriers.

"Did you think I only brought along these dragon-type demonic beasts? You wouldn't be able to easily break through their defense, you know. Well then, I will show you. I will show the other power I had obtained — the power of Gods!"

Freed began to focus and recited the chant in mutter. On his hand, there was a large fabric where complex and bizarre magic array was drawn. According to what he said, it was another power of Gods. He probably meant the Age of Gods magic he obtained in this «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». Knowing the great effect of an Age of Gods magic, Hajime's party began to attack furiously, to not let him finished his chant.

However, once they broke through the barrier of the Ash Dragons, a new barrier would immediately activated behind the previous one, thus their attacks could not reach Freed. Normally, Hajime would've asked Yue and the other two to cover him and go forward using "Aerodynamic," but he still haven't completely healed, so it would be difficult for him to beat the group of Ash Dragons. Thinking so, Hajime grinded his teeth.

Hajime put away Donner, and fired all ammos of Orkan whose recoil was small, but they only blew away several of the Ash Dragons' barriers, that's all. They weren't able to reach Freed. Even the Cross Bits that had quite the power couldn't completely destroy all of the barriers.

And the time was up. Freed finished his chant.

""Boundary Piercer.""

"Kh! Behind you! Hajime-san!"

At the same time as the last letter of the magic's name was said, Freed and the white dragon disappeared. More accurately, shining membrane-like thing appeared and they jumped inside. The time Freed said the magic's name and Shia's warning were the same, so Hajime's party, without having time to be wide eyed from astonishment, turned their heads around.

There was… right before Hajime a white dragon's whitely opened mouth and Freed on top of it, aiming at Hajime. Inside the dragon's mouth were extreme heat and magic power which concentrated and compressed until the limit. Hajime immediately used Orkan as a shield and at the same time, the beam was fired from zero distance.

BOoOoOoOoOOOM

"Ghh!! AaAAAH!!"

Accompanied by a roaring sound, the held up Orkan was hit by the beam and Hajime was blown away. The severe impact and the damage made his flesh screamed, and Hajime raised an agonized groan from his clenched mouth.

"Hajime!"

Wanting to help Hajime who was blown away by the beam, Yue and the girls immediately tried to attack the white dragon, but the Ash Dragons attacked in a barrage as if they knew what the girls would do.

While he didn't receive a direct hit from the beam, the impact from being blown away made Hajime's wound reopened, and his blood sprayed. Hajime was desperately holding Orkan with his wounded right arm and braced himself using "Aerodynamic." Then, thinking he would be dropped into the boiling sea if this keeps up, Hajime activated "Limit Break."

It was a dangerous bet to activate "Limit Break" with a wounded body. Normally, he would only be exhausted after using "Limit Break," but with his current condition, he would likely to become paralyzed afterward. Even so, Hajime judged that using it was indeed necessary to break through this situation.

Hajime's body wrapped inside a torrent shining brightly red, his power swelled up explosively.

"RAaAAA!!"

Roaring, he slanted Orkan to forcibly avert the beam up. Even so, he could not completely avert it, and he was blown away while spouting blood because of the beam.

The white dragon continued attacking by firing numerous light bullets which was the same as Hydra's. However, the dragon's beam was far tougher than the hydra, so the light bullets also couldn't be underestimated. Furthermore, its combination with a user of Age of Gods magic made it extremely troublesome.

"Cross Bitt!"

With the incoming light bullets, Hajime concentrated to his limit, entering the slowed down world and was evading like a swaying fallen leaf. Following that, he put away Orkan that had become useless because it had melted, and fired Donner, while also making the Cross Bit fly to assault Freed at the same time.

"How tenacious! To dodge a decisive blow by a hair-breadth-!"

Covered again by the barrier of the turtle-shaped demonic beast, Freed was grinding his teeth as he watched the seriously wounded Hajime's tenacity in wonder. Then, he once again begin to recite the chant while the white dragon flew at high speed.

"This one won't let you!"

Towards Freed and the white dragon who endured the fierce attack from the Cross Bits while firing the light bullets and backing away from Hajime to regain time to finish the chant, a mysterious voice suddenly resounded in the entire space. At the same time, they were attacked by a terrific impact from the flank.

Blown away, Freed stopped his chant and instinctively clung to the white dragon. He then looked at the one who blew away the ten meters long white dragon. He opened his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Black dragon!?"

"It seemth thou hath forgotten thy place and got carried away! This one won't let you hurt Master anymore!"

The one who blew Freed and the white dragon away was the "Dragonformed" Tio. Having accepted the risk that the Demon race would know about the Ryuujin race, Tio demonstrated her appearance. And even though she was one size smaller than the white dragon, her pressure far surpassed the white dragon.

The reason Tio decided to join Hajime's party on their journey was because she came to like Hajime, but also to observe the people who came from another world, and to find what her future move would be. With that, she wanted to conceal that she came from Ryuujin tribe. It was also her race's law, so she naturally would do that. After all, no matter how strong her race was, they wouldn't be able to fight against number. It was something that permeated inside their people from the persecution 500 years ago.

However, Hajime, who she was convinced to be invincible and could not be injured, had sustained severe injuries. Thus, when she saw Hajime had powerlessly collapsed because of the beam pouring down from the above, Tio's mind was attacked by fierce agitation.

She thought she had misunderstood something. Hajime is a human. If wounded in a moment of carelessness, it was possible for him to easily die. Tio gradually recalled this, and her, who had forgotten common sense due to her long life, was now clearly conscious of her feeling thank to her devotion towards Hajime. He was an object of her interest, but not as her Master. She understood now that Hajime was a "man" that she, as a woman, did not want to lose.

Therefore, she decided to "Dragonform" in front of others. She wouldn't be able to puff her chest and call them comrades if she was unwilling to do it in this crisis. Above all, the pride of Tio Clarce of Ryuujin race would not allow her to choose the law above her important person's life, neither could she do that.

"Young one! Remember this! This is the "Dragon"'s Breath!"

ROooOOOOooOaaaAAR

Accompanied with a roaring sound, a black flash immediately came to swallow the white dragon along with Freed. The white dragon twisted its body and fired its Breath beam towards the incoming Breath. Black and white flashes collided, scattering violent shock wave. The ocean of magma right below, centered on the colliding point, was rampaging and generating gigantic tsunamis of magma.

At first, Tio and the white dragon's Breaths were equal, but Tio's Breath began to gradually push the white dragon's.

"Kuh, for me to meet a survivor of Ryuujin race here… there's no other way. Although it is risky, I will use magic to make the space…"

"Do you think I will let you?!"

"Kh!?"

Maybe because he didn't have any report about the Ryuujin race, Freed was truly surprised. Seeing this situation, he gritted his teeth, took out another fabric from his pocket, and tried to chant the Age of Gods magic again.

However, he was interrupted by the impact followed a voice behind him.

It was Hajime who arrived behind Freed, unbeknownst to him, and fired Donner in succession while blood was spouted from his wounds. Six bullets were fired with one firing sound. All of the bullets, without deviating even a millimeter, were hitting the same place.

The turtle-shaped demonic beast by Freed's side had activated the barrier faster than Freed could react, but once impacted in almost zero distance by the flashes; the barrier shining in reddish black was easily smashed. Following that, Hajime slipped into the bosom of Freed who displayed his irritation and panicked.

Activating "Wind Claw" on Donner, Hajime swung it at once.

"Guaah!?"

By a hair's breadth, Freed escaped from being cut in two by falling behind. However, a horizontally slashed wound was carved on his chest. Hajime didn't stop his attack, rotating using the momentum from slashing Freed, he activated "Magic Shockwave" from "Magic Power Conversion" and back kicked Freed.

BAAAM!

"GAaAHH!!"

Freed barely guarded using his left arm, but he could not kill the momentum, and thus his left arm was crushed and his organs were damaged. Freed was horizontally blown away from the white dragon.

Noticing his master's disappearance, the white dragon lost its concentration and the black Breath approached it in a dash. Immediately after Hajime jumped off the white dragon, Tio's Breath grandly blew off the beam along with the white dragon.

"Roarrrr!!"

Screaming as it was being blown away, the white dragon somehow managed to regain its balance mid-air even after its belly received the attack from Tio's Breath, and it immediately flew towards the ceiling. Once again, Freed was on the back of an Ash Dragon with Freed. Reunited in the air, Freed once again boarded the white dragon.

Hajime tried to pursue using "Aerodynamic," however…

"Gh!? Gahakh!!"

The bright red light enveloping Hajime was disappearing rapidly, and not only from his wounds, but he also vomited a large amount of blood. His "Limit Break" had reached the time limit. In his wounded condition, the damage was further deepened from breaking his limit, and thus the time limit came earlier. Hajime was falling into the ocean of magma because his "Aerodynamic" was deactivated.

"Master! Hold on!"

"Guh, Ti-Tio…"

Tio flew to put the falling Hajime on her back. Hajime, whose damage deepened from "Limit Break"'s after effect and should have collapsed, managed to somehow get into kneeling position and his eyes shone as he glared at Freed above.

From what he saw, even the Ash Dragons that were attacking Yue and the girls had gathered by Freed's side.

"Hajime!"

"Hajime-san!"

Shouting Hajime's name, Yue and Shia came running. Tio landed in the nearby foothold. She did it because the possibility of the current Hajime not being able to endure Tio's battling movement and fall was high. Having jumped onto the same foothold, Yue and Shia immediately came to Hajime's side and supported his body.

"… What a dreadful force. Those women are also not normal. A Ryuujin race that should have been annihilated, no-chant no-array using magic-user, and a Rabbitman tribe with unexpected power and ability to see the future… They are also possibly users of Age of Gods magic. And to have cornered me now… it would have been my side that would have gotten beaten if I didn't first attack, huh…"

Squeezing his words, Freed was exchanging gaze with Hajime, creating sparks. Panting, Freed touch the wound carved on his chest with his unhurt right hand.

"Why are you assuming this is the end? I can still fight."

Hajime's expression turned ugly because of Freed's words. But even with his tattered body, Hajime's eyes were shining with killing intent while he declared the battle to continue.

"… Of course. The torrent of killing intent overflowing from you expressed you would not give up no matter how wounded you are. Not only do you have dreadful powers, you also have killing intent that could devour your enemy… No, was it the attachment to survive…"

Guessing once, then Freed made a resolute expression and glared at Hajime again.

"I don't want to use this method… but it is necessary to use it if it can kill powerful enemies like you."

"What did you say?"

Not answering Hajime's question, Freed said something to the small bird-shaped demonic beast, unknown as to when it landed on his shoulder.

Then,

RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE!

SPLASH!

KABOOM!

Great tremor shook the entire space, no, the entire «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», and the ocean of magma began to rampaging, accompanied with a terrific, roaring sound.

"Uoh!?"

"Nnah!?"

"Kyaa!?"

"Nuoh!?"

Suffering from the sudden shockwave from below, Hajime's party got on all fours and screamed, while desperately trying to balance themselves. The great tremor was gradually becoming even more intense, and could be said to reach seven in the

richter scale. From the ocean of magma, numerous fire pillars, no, magma pillars began to spout.

“Hajime-san! The magma level-!”

With Shia’s words, the magma surrounding the foothold, where Hajime’s party were, was indeed rising in level.

“What did he do?”

Hajime squeezed his words and asked the obvious culprit behind this situation, Freed. Having moved to the ceiling above the middle island, Freed answered the question.

“I only destroyed the keystone.”

“Key… stone?”

“That’s right. Didn’t you think it was strange when you saw the magma? «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» is obviously an active volcano. However, there’s no record of it erupting until now. What I mean, is there must be something controlling the activity of the underground magma reservoir.”

“That’s the “keystone,” huh… Don’t tell me!?”

“It is. I have destroyed the gigantic keystone that calmed down the magma reservoir. Thus, this Great Dungeon will soon be destroyed. And although I deeply regret that I can’t give my kins the Age of Gods magic of this dungeon… it isn’t that regrettable if it means I can kill you here. Be destroyed along with this Great Dungeon.”

Coldly looking down at Hajime’s party, Freed held a pendant on his neck towards the ceiling. Then, the crack on the ceiling began to be open. Along with the circular hole on the ceiling, several doors above it also opened.

Apparently, Freed had opened the shortcut to the outside using the proof of having conquered «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». For the last time, Freed glared at Hajime’s party then turned on his heel along with the white dragon, disappearing into the passage on the ceiling.

With the surrounding magma rampaged like the sea influenced by a hurricane, the number of spouted magma pillars kept increasing. The magma began to swallow the edges of the foothold where Hajime’s party were. It was a spectacle worthy to be called the end of world.

In a short while, Hajime closed his eyes and was thinking of something. Having decided on something, he stood up despite his injury. Immediately, the Ash Dragons left behind by Freed and the white dragon began to simultaneously fire small beams. They seem to want to kill Hajime's party here by all means.

While Yue was intercepting the small beam attacks using "Absolute Calamity," Hajime put his hand on the "Treasure Box." Then, he put his hand on the hard dragon scale covering Tio's cheeck, who was firing Breath towards the Ash Dragons overhead, to make her face him.

"Tio, listen. Take this and you alone must escape from that ceiling to the outside."

For a moment, Tio was blinking, not understanding what was said. Then, she realized it in the next moment and raised a voice which mixed with sadness and anger. Hajime's words were as if telling her to let herself survived, casting him and the other two away.

"Master, is this one, is this one not worth spending the last time with thee? Art thou discarding this one? This one…"

"That's not it, Tio. I will say it just once because there's not much time left. I am not giving up anything at all. I will get the Age of Gods magic and I will someday beat that bastard. Also, I am going to fulfil my promise to bring back the "Serene stone." However, it is impossible to do it alone. That's why I want you to lend me your power. If it is not you, it is impossible to break through everything and return to Ancadi… Please, Tio."

Hajime looked at the dragonformed Tio with a serious gaze he had never looked at her with before. With his pride and arrogance, Hajime had said he would be able to do anything by himself, but he relied on her. Expressing he needed Tio's cooperation to accomplish his wishes, and to overcome all of the difficulties. He said he needed Tio's power. There was neither trace of him giving up, trying to sacrifice himself, nor was he excluding Tio at all.

The sadness and anger in Tio's heart changed radically into one of joy as she trembled. She was "entrusted" with something important by the man she liked, no, the one she wanted to be her partner in this life and death situation. She would not be a woman if she didn't answer him.

Therefore, Tio only answered with one sentence.

"Leave it to this one!"

Hajime put “Treasure Box” in the inner part of Tio’s scale. Doing so, he was directly touching the Tio’s body while she was in her dragon form.

Confirming the “Treasure Box” with her skin, Tio quietly rubbed her head against Hajime. It was the best expression of love she could do now. Hajime also gently stroked Tio once before he parted. Tio turned her gaze to Yue and Shia. Then, she nodded powerfully having felt that the two also haven’t given up.

“Tio, deliver this message to Kaori and Myuu. “I will meet you later.” Okay.”

“Fufu, acknowledged.”

The too nonchalant message Hajime gave made Tio laugh inadvertently, and after a beat, she flew at once while cladded by a powerful wind. Using barrelroll to evade the incoming small beams, Tio immediately tried to pierce through the group of Ash Dragons. The Ash Dragons, sensing the crisis from the black dragon’s movement, concentrated their attacks on Tio.

The rushing small beams were counterbalanced by Tio’s Breath, but it wasn’t easy because the beams keep coming one after another. However, the moment the balance about to collapse, a beam gushed out from below and blew several Ash Dragons that were attacking Tio.

It was the small beams compressed and fired by Yue’s “Absolute Calamity.” In addition, exploding-slug bullets were fired and the shock wave blew the Ash Dragons away.

Suddenly, maybe because Freed and the white dragon had reached outside, the doors on the ceiling began to close. Realizing she didn’t have much time, Tio focused on accelerating with resolution of receiving the bombardment. Tio’s flight speed was further increased, but the fired off small beams began to break Tio’s dragon scale.

“Hmph, a pain only of this degree, it feels good! Bring it on~!”

Just as she said, Tio’s mood brightened along with the increment of her speed whenever the attack from the Ash Dragons damaged her body. It was the effect of “Pain Conversion” in “Dragonform.” The more pain she felt, the more her tension increased along with temporary boost of her ability, an awful skill derivation. Incidentally, it was something she obtained when she met Hajime after living for several hundreds of years. So, rather than “breaking through the wall (as in the wall before the skill derived),” it was more like “the door had opened.”

With the Ash Dragons somewhat taken aback, Tio passed through the storm of small beams and passed through the door right before it closed. Looking above, a small,

nostalgic light could be seen. It was the light of the outside. There were still several doors that had begun to close one by one.

Without thinking about the consequence, Tio used her magic, except some that would be used to maintain "Dragonform," to the limit and manipulated the wind. Recalling the long life she had, it was a speed she had never use before. She literally flew, turning into a gale.

She passed through one door, two doors, three doors, and she finally arrived at the last door; a thick door connected to the outside. Tio was going forward while surrounded by black wind like a cannonball. And light bullets attacked her from above.

Apparently, Freed and the white dragon had noticed Tio, and thus they stopped to attack her. Now, more than half of the door had been closed. Rotating while evading, Tio didn't lower her speed even if she could not evade the bombardment, and the white dragon fired off the beam.

Exhausted of its magic power, the beam didn't have the force it had in the beginning. It was only half of its usual power at best. However, the damage, if Tio was hit by it, would still surpass the one she received from the small beams. Furthermore, her speed would fall if she evade or intercept it. If so, she might not make it in time before the door closed.

Tio steeled herself, and she further raised her speed using "Pain Conversion" right after the bombardment of the light bullets.

And at that time, several shadows passed through Tio's side, appearing in between Tio and the incoming beam.

They were things Tio knew just by seeing. The floating crosses, all-ranged weapons, Hajime's Cross Bits. They had followed right behind Tio.

The three Cross Bits that came out were clad in bright red light, tried to change the angle of the beam, and averted it to the side. Although they were destroyed one after another by the force of the beam, they had interrupted the beam and protected Tio. Furthermore, another four Cross Bits flew to Tio's side to protect her.

"Nuhaa~, can't hold it! Masterrr, this one love you~!"

Even though he might get overcome by the torrent of magma, Hajime had still controlled all of the Cross Bits from the ground to protect Tio. Thus, Tio roared towards the world, shouting her love. Being especially strong even amongst the Ryuujin tribe, Tio had never been protected by a man up until now. It was always

her who did the protection. That's why, the fact that she was protected during such an extremely difficult situation made her exploded in joy from the sensation she had never felt.

"Guuroarrr!!!"

With a dragon's roar, she passed through the last door. Having turned into a mass of black wind, Tio flew out vertically, dancing under the sunlight that poured down surrounded by the gigantic sandstorm.

"For the situation to turn out like this…-! What a monster! But that black dragon is covered in wounds. I will kil-!?"

Tio who flew overhead made Freed on the white dragon astonished, but he immediately sharpened his gaze and tried to attack. However, his plan and words were interrupted. The four Cross Bits had surrounded Freed and the white dragon from all directions before they were aware of them.

Freed made the turtle-shaped demonic beast he took during his escape to promptly put up a barrier. After all, it had been proven that the Cross Bit's offensive power could not destroy the barrier. And although the result might have been different if they were loaded with explosive bullets, the exploding-slug bullets in Shia's ranged attack were scarce, and Hajime had given priority to the bullets on Donner-Schlag, thus he had no time to implement it on the Cross Bits.

However, the Cross Bits have one more powerful attack method. This method made Freed's composed expression freeze, proven by how he was blown away along with the white dragon after receiving a huge damage.

KABOOOOOOM!

When thinking it was odd the Cross Bits didn't shoot and abruptly shined red, but in the next moment, they exploded.

The four Cross Bits had been positioned in all sides to not let their targets escaped from the impact. The grand, powerful impact and the bullets that scattered like a storm easily destroyed the barrier, attacking Freed and the white dragon.

"GAaAAH!!"

"RUaAAAAn!!"

The master and servant were mutually screaming as they were blown away.

In addition, Tio attacked with tornado, pushing Freed and the white dragon into the sandstorm. Tio had wanted to shoot out Breath to kill them for sure, but she could not because she didn't have much strength left.

Tio watched the place where Freed and the white dragon had disappeared for a while, then she moved her gaze after she to confirm there's no change at all. She quietly watched the «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» before her without even a trace of her perverted tension remaining. Next, nodding as if expressing "This one will believe in thee," she turned around and flew towards Ancadi.

After several tens of minutes, a great earthquake with «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» as the epicentre, with sounds surpassing roaring sounds, a great explosion occurred that even cracked the atmosphere, and temporarily blew off the sandstorm. Black, black smoke rose from «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» while scorching rocks went flying, and sparks scattered from the volcano.

It was a great eruption of «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» that was recorded to have never erupted in history. In a way, it was a historical moment. After a few minutes, the volcano was once again wrapped with a veil of gigantic sandstorm, concealing its bizarreness.

Even so, the roaring sound that seemed to be the scream of the world along with the spouted black smoke was certainly seen by the people of Ancadi. Their uneasiness grew stronger. It was also felt by the girl and little girl who were waiting for their important people to return.

Chapter 9 : Inside the Scorching Heat

"… Self-destruction is a man's romance."

"? … Hajime?"

"Hajime-san?"

Hajime who suddenly muttered with a grin while the small beams poured from above, made Yue and Shia looked at him with dubious expressions. Shaking his head to tell them it was nothing, Hajime was supported by the two and somehow managed to jump and arrived at the edge of the middle island.

The surrounding magma had become more and more rampaging since the time Tio flew away, and there was no other foothold except the middle island. The middle island would also be swallowed in less than five minutes.

Yue swallowed the pouring down small beams using "Absolute Calamity" while Shia swung down Doryukken at the Ash Dragons, who became impatient and came to directly attack them, making them fell into the magma. Already ten of Ash Dragons were defeated.

The magma dome they saw in the beginning above the middle island had already disappeared, and they could see a jet-black building in exchange. Nearby the building was a disk floating a few centimeters above the ground. It might be the thing normally used to get out from the shortcut that allowed the ceiling to open earlier.

Leering at the Ash Dragons desperately trying to dodge the magma pillars gushing out and attacking them, Hajime's party approached the jet-black building.

At a glance, it only looked like a tall building without any door, but a part of the wall had the same crests of the Seven Great Dungeons carved in. Standing before that part of wall, the wall soundlessly slid and the party entered the building. The party entered the building at the same time the magma flowed, swallowing the middle island. Once again, the door closed soundlessly and halted the magma from flowing inside within a hair's breadth.

After watching the door for a while and seeing the door didn't melt nor were there any magma flowing inside, Hajime's party breathe sighs of relief. They had expected the dwelling to be built here and have prepared for such a case. Thus, the result was a relief.

"We are safe for the time being… Even so, for this room to even intercepted the vibration…"

"Nn… Hajime, over there."

"A magic circle."

As soon as he entered the room, Hajime was surprised from not feeling the major tremor. Responding to his mutter, Yue, who was by his side, pointed her finger. The thing she pointed at was a complex and exquisite magic formation. The magic array for Age of Gods Magic. The party nodded at each other and came into the formation.

Just like the time in «Orcus Great Dungeon», their memories flowed out without permission, tracking how they conquered the dungeon. Thus, after it was confirmed

that they conquered it from subjugating all of the Magma Serpents, the Age of Gods magic was directly carved into their brains.

"… I see, this is Spatial Magic."

"… The seed for instant movement."

"Ahh, just like that guy who suddenly appeared from behind, right."

Apparently, the Age of Gods Magic resided in «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was "Spatial Magic." Another magic that could interfere with an unexpected thing. As usual, the magic at the Age of Gods was far from being normal.

Yue was referring to Freed's surprise attack. The very first surprise attack was likely to appear from above using the Spatial magic. Although she didn't understand whether he teleported or just distorted the space to hide, it didn't change the fact that it was troublesome. Even his second surprise attack would have hit Hajime if not for Shia's "Decided Future," derived from "Foresight." A fine play.

At the same time Hajime's party mastered the Spatial magic, the light from magic formation dimmed and *shiiiing*, a part of the wall opened and shining letters began to appear on the wall before them.

"I sincerely wish for the free will of the people in the future."
– *Naiz Guryuu-en*

"… How simple."

Upong seeing the message, that was the impression Hajime had. Seeing the surroundings, he noticed that the dwelling of the founder of «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was quite dreary. The feeling where someone lived here just like in the dwelling of Orcus couldn't be felt. It was truly a place with nothing but the magic formation.

"… It seems to be his own arrangement."

"Looks like Naiz-san didn't leave anything except the magic."

"Now that I remember it, that Naiz appeared in Oscar's note. He seemed to be a truly taciturn person."

With Shia supporting Hajime's left flank, Yue walked to the wall with fist size opening and took out the pendant from inside. It was similar to the proofs of

conquering other dungeons, but the circular pendant had different designs. Yue quietly put in on Hajime's neck.

"… Now that we have obtained both the magic and proof. Next is how we get out of here."

"… Does Hajime have any idea?"

"Hajime-san must have an idea, right? The outside is probably had been completely filled with magma, you know?"

Although they told their worries, not a trace of uneasiness could be felt from Yue and Shia. While feeling glad from the two's trust, Hajime told them his escape plan.

"Of course, we are going to swim inside the magma."

"… Nn?"

"… Come again?"

The far too insufficient information was too difficult to understand, making Yue and Shia think, "Was his head severely damaged after all?" The two asked again with expressions worrying about Hajime's head.

"I will explain it properly so please don't look at me like that. Hmm, actually, I have prepared a submarine that can be used immediately after we get out of this building. It is something I created because I thought it was necessary for the «Meljeene, Bottom of the Sea Ruin». Honestly, I was a little worried whether it could endure the magma, but that small boat was okay after being cladded with Vajra, so I tried it myself. And as expected, it looks like it will be okay."

"Ju-just when in the world did you make that…" Shia spoke in amazement, and amazement could also be seen in Yue's eyes.

Actually, at the time Freed said he destroyed the keystone, Hajime had directly transferred the submarine from "Treasure Box" into the magma. He had thought of forcibly breaking through the ceiling along with Tio if it melted. But since it didn't melt (using induction stone), he knew they would be able to escape even if the space was filled with magma.

However, because the scale of the tremor of the «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» was obviously a dangerous one, along with the things collapsing all over the place, they would likely to be incapable of escaping smoothly. Thus, with the time limit approaching for them to return to Ancadi, they didn't have the time to leisurely

looking for the escape route. As such, he decided to let Tio escaped before them. It was so that the "Serene Stone" would be brought back within the time limit.

"The escape route is of course the shortcut on the ceiling. Yue, I leave the barrier to you until we get into the boarding gate of the submarine. You can do it, right?"

"Nh… leave it to me."

Nodding at Hajime's words, Yue concentrated and created triple layers of "Divine Interruption." The shining barrier covered Hajime's group of three. The three nodded at each other and stood before the door. Afterwards, the door connected to the outside filled with boiling magma, opened.

Bang! A sound immediately rang out and the scorching torrent of magma flowed into the room. And although "Divine Interruption" indeed protected Hajime's party from the magma, their views were instantly dyed in crimson. With unbelievable spectacle of seeing magma while being submerged, even though they were prepared, Hajime's party still found themselves at a loss for words. And although there was a saying "the world is wide," there probably have been no one but Hajime's party who have experience such a spectacle.

"It is right outside. Let's go!"

"Nh."

"Y-Yes!"

With Hajime's instructions, the three slowly went outside. And although it was a closed room they didn't know anything about, just like what Hajime said, upon reaching it with "Divine Interruption," they immediately stood before a place they understood was the gate. While Yue adjusted the barrier, they arrived right in front of the hatch, and the three were finally able to board on the submarine. And instinctively, Hajime's party were relaxed.

And at that moment,

DOOORUUUUUUNNNG!!!

A tremor far greater from the ones before now attacked the entire space. The magma suddenly began to flow into one direction with a tremendous momentum. The submarine was swept by the swift current. Inside it, Hajime's party were as if they were inside a mixer as they keep spinning in all of directions.

"Guwah!?"

“Nnya!?”

“Hau!? It hurts!”

Each of them had their bodies thrown all over the wall and screamed. Yue immediately activated “Absolute Calamity,” used the small, black, swirling orb to pull them, and they somehow managed to get out of the shaker-like situation.

“P-Phew. Thank you, Yue.”

“Thank you very much, Yue-san.”

“Nn… more importantly.”

Yue moved the “Absolute Calamity” and carried Hajime to the place that seemed to be the control seat. Hajime supplied his magic power and tried to control the submarine inside the viscous and intensely flowing magma, but as he thought, the rudder could not be controlled.

“Tch, if it is an eruption then being thrown outside is a lucky thing.”

“… Is there something else?”

Hajime’s bitter expression made Yue tilted her head.

“Ah. I have installed a certain stone just like the one in Cross Bits to lose sight of directions inside the magma. I know the location of the shortcut in the ceiling from the Cross Bits going outside of the dungeon before they exploded, but… this flow is moving away from the exit.”

“Eh? Does it mean we are diving underground?”

“Yeah, well, rather than diving underground, it is more like it’s moving diagonally… Now then, I wonder where it’s connected to… Yue, Shia. We can’t return immediately after all. There’s nothing we can do except to go with the flow.”

Hajime’s resolute expression made Yue and Shia only relaxed their gaze and quietly drew close to him.

“… I will be by your side until the end. I don’t have any complain as long as that is fulfilled.”

“Fufu… Literally, even if it is inside the fire and the water, eh. Me, too, I will go “anywhere” as long as I can be together with the two of you!”

"… I see. I am the same."

Hajime relaxed and returned a smile towards the two.

Hajime's group of three were drawing close to each other inside the submarine while they were swept by the scorching torrent.

* * *

At the time Hajime's party were swept by the magma underground into the unknown after being unable to escape from «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», a shadow was flying unsteadily above the brown, raging sand of «Guryuu-en Great Desert».

Needless to say, it was the "Dragonformed" Tio.

"Ugh… this is rather bad… for the love of, that was a nasty Breath… there's no other way. Master, sorry about this."

Having forcibly broken through, Tio was basked in a large amount of beam whose toxin ended up aggravating her wounds. As such, judging she would be collapsed before she arrived at Ancadi, Tio apologized to Hajime for taking out from "Treasure Box" and crunched the vial of the special potion, the Holy Water, without permission.

Although she had consumed a large amount of magic power from firing Breaths in succession, surpassing her body's limit, and reinforcing her flight ability, she had now considerably recovered. Moreover, even though her wounds didn't instantaneously healed, the toxin had been suppressed.

Afterwards, she flew for several hours and she could finally see Ancadi in her view. If she kept flying any more than this, the people on the watchtower would be able to see Tio's current appearance. For a moment, Tio wondered whether or not to release her dragon form. However, thinking it would surely be necessary for her to be in her dragonformed while she travels with Hajime, since the Demon race man named Freed was likely to still be alive, she decided to come clean about it.

Also, her hidden town wasn't something that could easily be found. Even if it was found by chance, the Ryuujin race would not go downed that easily. Besides, if it turned into the nightmare (persecution) just like five hundred years ago, Hajime would surely lend Tio his power if she asked for his help. After all, Hajime was sweet to his companion.

While thinking so, she was finally only several kilometers away from Ancadi. From what she could see, the watchtower was in a commotion. Thus, because it would be

a hassle to be attacked due to a misunderstanding, Tio made a detour towards the entrance gate and landed slightly away from it.

ZIIIIIIIIIIIIIIP!

Ancadi's Soldiers moved towards Tio, who landed and created sand dust, with row formation. If one looked above the walls, many Soldiers were standing by with bow or magic array-carved staff in hand.

The sand dust was clearing away. The Soldiers could be heard gulping from nervousness. However, what appeared from the sand was a beautiful, gold-eyed, black-haired woman who looked extremely exhausted, making the soldiers looked at each other in bewilderment.

From among the confused Soldiers, a girl came out. It was a girl whose hair was black like Tio's, Kaori. Behind her, the Soldiers and the Lord's son, Viz, were telling her it was dangerous, but Kaori completely ignored them and she fiercely running towards the kneeling, panting Tio.

Having heard the report from the watchtower and knowing Tio was from Ryuujin race, Kaori had guessed Hajime was returning and ran in a hurry.

"Tio! Are you okay!?"
"Huh, Kaori… ugh, this one is rather okay. This one is just a little tired."

Kaori's expression changed when she saw Tio's body covered in wounds, and looking very exhausted. She immediately knelt nearby Tio's side, and hurriedly examined her condition. When she came to know there was an unknown toxin in Tio's body, she instantly began to activate detoxification and recovery magic at the same time.

"How… for it to not be detoxified…"

However, even the Holy Water needed time to detoxify the beam's toxin. Thus, Kaori's magic was unable to immediately detoxify it. However, although Kaori's face was distorted, Tio had considerably recovered thanks to the effect of the previously taken Holy Water, and Kaori's extraordinary recovery magic. She said to Kaori, "There's no need to worry, it will be detoxified soon," with a smile as she patted Kaori's head.

Guessing there was indeed nothing to worry about judging by Tio's expression, Kaori relaxed and smiled in relief. Following that, she looked around the surrounding and her expression gradually turned into one of unease.

"Tio… um, what about Hajime-kun and the other two? Is it only you? Also, what was… that eruption…"

"Calm down, Kaori. This one will explain everything. But first, tell the soldiers behind thou to calm down and take this one to a place where we can have a talk."

"Ah, nn, I will."

Only now did Kaori noticed the confused Soldiers behind her, and thus she nodded powerfully even though her expression was one of unease. Tio's expression that didn't contain any grievance was also a factor that helped Kaori to calm down.

Kaori ran back towards Viz, the Soldiers, and Randzi who had come, too. Explaining the circumstance, she took Tio to a place where they could talk in peace.

* * *

"So, about Hajime-kun and the other two…"

"Hmm, they will surely return soon. After all, Master didn't think of giving up. And although this one didn't hear anything due to not having time for that, Master certainly had a plan to escape."

Having heard what happened in «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», Kaori turned pale while clenching her fists tightly. The uneasiness she felt since the time she and the people of Ancadi saw the gigantic eruption swelt up.

Towards Kaori who clenched her fists and seemed like she would collapse at any time, Tio quietly put her own hands on top of Kaori's. Afterwards, she watched Kaori with a powerful gaze.

"Kaori. This one hath a message from Master."

"From Hajime-kun?"

"Mhm. Actually it is for both Kaori and Myuu… "I will meet you later," Master said."

Kaori had thought it would be something like "I will surely return" or "Don't worry" kind of words to reassure Kaori and Myuu. However, the too nonchalant words as if he was saying "I am going to a convenience store now, so let's meet later," made Kaori openmoutedly dumbfounded.

Crossing her mind was Hajime's figure who raised a fearless smile and said, "Such a thing is nothing if I become serious, you know?" It was a reassuring figure that would break through any kind of difficulty while smiling. While she was naturally

imagining his figure, Kaori was smiling wryly because it was the most reassuring message rather than some kind of unskillful, tough words.

“I see, then it will be okay, huh.”

“Mhm, no matter how desperate the situation looks like, Master will surely return like nothing’s happened. It is something this one believes…”

“Un… Hajime will be okay. That’s why, I must do the things I can here.”

“That’s right. This one will, of course, help thou.”

Recalling how Hajime had missing in the Great Dungeon, Kaori thought Hajime would surely be okay, and like Tio, she believed in him while clenching her fists tightly. Kaori stood up, and she had a resolute look in her eyes to heal the weakened people, who had distributed with the powder from the large amount of “Serene Stone” that was passed on to Randzi’s group earlier.

Afterwards, they explained the situation to Myuu who was entrusted to the Lord’s daughter, Airi (14 y.o), in the palace. And although Myuu was going to cry because her Hajime papa didn’t return, Tio told her that Hajime’s daughter must not cry easily, so she endured it with puffed cheeks.

Although Myuu was someone from the Sea-dweller tribe, knowing she was a companion of a “God’s apostle”, Kaori, and after looking after her for a while, the people of the palace were knocked out by Myuu’s cuteness. Airi, who was prohibited from going out due to her still weakened state, was especially fond of Myuu.

Although there was still the situation about Tio being from the Ryuujin race, Randzie and the other didn’t make a big commotion about it because although they were still in doubt, it didn’t change the fact that she was the dukedom’s benefactor, risking her life to bring them the “Serene Stone.”

Kaori and the others healed the patients one after another, but Hajime’s group still haven’t returned even after two days passed, thus their expressions gradually darkened. Tio had searched for any trace of Hajime’s group along the route to «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» several times, but she was at a loss from not finding anything.

Then, after three days had passed since Tio’s return, Kaori made a suggestion to Myuu and Tio.

"I think there's no more patient that needs treatment from me now. They only need to rest after this, so it won't be a problem to leave it to the medical center's staff members. That's why… let's go to look for Hajime-kun's group."

"Papa? We are going to meet papa?"

"Hmm, thou art right. This one hath also thought it was about the time to make a move."

Myuu gladly leaned her body to Kaori's words while Tio was agreeing with eager expression.

"But, I think we can't take Myuu along to «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», after all."

"Thou art correct. If not, there will be no meaning for Master to entrust Myuu to this place. Besides, the eruption from before made it hard to search for them safely."

"Yeah. I think so, too. That's why I thought of going to Elisen first to return Myuu-chan to her mama."

"Fumu, it is indeed a good idea… Yup. Then, it will be better for thee to ride on this one's back. If it is only until Elisen, this one doesth not even need a day. We will arrive at the evening if we move out in the morning."

The advancing conversation made a large amount of flowers of "?" bloomed above Myuu's head. After Kaori explained to Myuu in an easily understandable manner, Myuu made a sad expression because they were not going to meet Hajime. However, she also wanted to meet her mother. After the two told her they were going to wait for Hajime papa with her, Myuu somehow consented although in reluctance. How Myuu was balancing her real mother with her papa made Kaori and Tio could not help but making wry smiles.

The next day, while watched by the Lord who seemed to want to restrain them, and Viz with his feverish gaze, Kaori and Myuu got on dragonformed Tio's back and flew to the west. From behind, the voice of gratitude and Kaori's name were grandly resounding from the people.

Thinking about her dear person who was once again missing, Kaori vowed to find him again for sure, and she looked straight ahead.

Afterwards, they never thought they would too easily be reunited with him…

Chapter 10 : A Girl Fell From the Sky, the MC's Daughter in this Case

Blue as far as one could see.

A clear sky stretched into the horizon, and the sunlight poured down brilliantly. However, it wasn't that hot, and the climate made it easy to spend the time here. The gentle breeze blowing time after time felt good. Only, there wasn't a single "thing" no matter how much one looked at the surrounding which made one feels a little lonely.

To begin with, that feeling wasn't something that could be helped with. It was in the middle of ocean after all.

At the very center of the ocean, was a ship swaying, drifting about the waves. Well, it wasn't known whether it was okay to call it a ship. After all, the people of this world wouldn't be able to recognize this as a "ship".

As for the reason, the ship's body was a black, lustrous streamline shaped, without a place for passenger to board it unlike normal ships. Normally, the body would also have two small wing-like thingy on both side creating V shape and a screw-like rudder attached behind it… but the only thing that could be seen was the devastated remain of them. If it was smoothed out, the original slightly flat orca-like shape could be seen.

However, surely the people of this world would agree to call it a new kind of demonic beast rather than a ship. The orca-shaped ship was a submarine. Needless to say, it was Hajime's artefact, allowing its passengers to narrowly escape from death after being thrown inside the magma in «Guryuu-en Great Volcano». In return, it was broken to the level of bring majorly damaged.

Lying above the floating submarine while it was being swept by the waves, with both hands at the back of his head was Hajime sporting an extremely satisfied look. His artificial left arm that was melt after being attacked by the beam and unable to move properly had been fixed using the material from the submarine and returned to its original form. However, the gimmicks installed couldn't be used.

"… Hajime, how's your condition?"

While dozing off cradled by the warm sunlight and the rocking wave, the hatch behind him suddenly opened. Yue popped her head out and asked his about his condition worriedly. It was because Hajime had received huge damage from the beam, and because of the beam's toxin, the wound doesn't easily recover.

"There's no problem at all. All the wounds are already closed. But I feel it will need at least another day for a complete recovery… More importantly, how's the thing on Yue's side? You are considerably exhausted, right?

"Nn… I am okay. Shia gave me her blood after all."

Hajime's words of worries were joyfully answered by Yue who got out from the hatch and came Hajime's side, who was lying down, in all fours. Thus, with an extremely natural movement, she laid on top of Hajime. Her soft butt was pressing up against Hajime and stimulated him in a really bad place.

"… Yue-san, why did you get on top of me?"

"… Because Hajime is there."

Although the answer was just like a certain mountaineer, Yue's gaze was serious. Next, Hajime was attacked with a muttered, "… stay like that," concealed with bewitchment as she flop her body. She licked Hajime's neck, bit him, and licked the blood that flowed out.

"… Nn, almost all of the toxin has disappeared. It seems like there's no need to worry."

Apparently, she licked the Hajime's blood to confirm how much the beam's toxin remained.

"Didn't I say there's no problem at all?"

"… Nn. But, I can't help but worry. Our current location is also problem… But I am glad Hajime can rest easy."

"Well yeah. It was a truly rapid development. I don't know whether we are lucky or unlucky…"

Hajime, who was smiling wryly, made Yue frowned with furrowed eyebrows, troubled. The two recalled how they got swallowed by the magma in «Guryuu-en Great Volcano», drifting until they got to where they were at now, in the vast ocean. They had suffered a lot of misfortune that could be lamented on along the way, but it was a happy and lucky thing that they survived. A kind of delicate mindset.

After they were thrown into the magma and drifted underground, Hajime's party were exposed to the swift current for one full day. Because they couldn't always use the attracting force of Yue's "Absolute Calamity" to control the position of their bodies, Hajime somehow managed to create gravity stone using Creation magic,

producing floating seat after much trial and error inside the stormy submarine. So, although the submarine kept producing sound just like a toy crashing into walls, the floating seat somehow managed to keep them away from a shaker-like situation.

Following that, with Yue and Shia clinging on his right and left, he spent the sleepless time lighted by the faint light of Green Light stone.

'Could it be we are going straight into the planet's mantle?' Hajime began to question accompanied with cold sweat. However, their underground travel onto the unknown finally ended. Hajime's party was attacked by the biggest impact they had felt until now. The tremendous impact broke through the defense of "Vajra" and damaged the submarine. Along with the impact, the submarine was blown away with tremendous speed.

Hurriedly reactivating "Vajra" after the intense impact, Hajime questioned what happened and used the remote camera function from "Farsight stone" installed even in the Cross Bit to confirm the surrounding. Following that, the spectacle that entered his view was not the red world filled by magma, but magma writhing like a snake and greatly boiling the rampaging "sea."

Apparently, Hajime's party was blown away by the so called phreatomagmatic explosion when they spouted from a submerged volcano. The impact damaged the hull, but fortunately the water didn't flood in, or maybe it should be said as expected of Hajime's artifact.

Narrowly escaping from death, Hajime's party was relieved to be able to return to the surface, but their suffering continued.

After being dumbfounded from turning round and round by the eruption, and then thrown out into the sea, the party immediately regained the control of the submarine and began their sailing. Both wings and stern were seriously damaged, but it was possible to sail by supplying the submarine with magic power. There was no problem other than the fuel consumption rate was overwhelmingly worse compared to when the screw, wings, and stern could be used.

Because it wouldn't be able to endure another eruption, Hajime's party hurriedly moved away, but a gigantic shadow followed the orca-shaped submarine. It was a gigantic squid-like creature. With length reaching 30 meters, and with more than 30 wriggling tentacles, its appearance was similar to a sea monster, the Kraken.

The monster mercilessly attacked the submarine. Twined by tentacles, the submarine was about to be crunched by sharp fangs that in the middle of its mouth. However, the monster was repelled by the submarine's weapon (torpedo) and Yue's magic.

Nevertheless, it didn't end even after they repelled the Kraken-like monster. This time, they were attacked by a flock of sharks. The sharks were a kind of demonic beast, annoying enemies that cooperated while shooting out water tornados.

In the end, the ammunition inside the submarine was depleted and they could only rely on Yue's magic. It was a situation where Yue used the magic power stocked inside Magic-crystallization stone and sucked Shia's blood, since Hajime had already loss a large amount of blood. They somehow managed to get away while repelling the sharks, but they fought in «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» before so Hajime's party had indeed exhausted all of their energy. Although Shia didn't really do anything, she collapsed from anemia due to offering her blood to Yue because it was "the least" she could do.

Letting Yue and Shia rest, Hajime moved the submarine to the surface. They were in a location where there was only the sea and blue sky as far as the eye could reach, so they advanced towards the continent. Then, after sailing for half a day, due to calm climate and wave, Hajime halted the sub and rested, basking in the sunlight outside the sub.

The development from conquering «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» until the present time was truly a rapid one. No matter what, it could be said that other people except Hajime's party wouldn't have any possibility of surviving at all. It was alright for Hajime to unconsciously want to shout "What a bad luck!" like a certain user of gender-equal punch.

"How's Shia?"

Although he was looking at the distance, Hajime asked Yue who's currently seated on top of him.

"… She is still sleeping. I drank a lot… so she probably won't wake up for a while."

Yue's reason was that the amount converted to magic power wasn't as efficient compared to when she sucked Hajime's blood. It was because the amount converted was several times more from Hajime, her partner of "Blood Pact," than Shia who wasn't. After picking the partner for "Blood Pact," the effect of "Blood Conversion" from other people lowered while the effect became several times bigger if it was her contracted partner.

"I see. Well, it's better for her to rest now. Anyway, we don't know our current location much less about the time needed to reach the continent. We also don't know what will happen so it is better to take our time to recover."

"…Nn."

The sea was at the west of the continent, so they only needed to head for the east to reach the continent. There was no problem because they could create water from magic and catch fish for meals. Things like fishes wouldn't be able to escape from the submarine and magic, so even though they were in the middle of the vast ocean, it wasn't a situation to be panicked about. Also, as long as they can confirm their location using the star at night, they could determine the course towards the continent. As such, they rested when they should.

The warm sunlight and breeze made Hajime relaxed. Watching Hajime with narrowed eyes, Yue…

"… Yue-san. What are you doing?"

"… Making Hajime energetic."

Before he was aware of it, Yue exuded a bewitching aura and moved slowly. She seemed to want to energize him. But although she didn't say which part, when Hajime saw Yue's blurred eyes, he didn't even think of resisting.

"Ngh… fufu, Hajime has become energetic."

"… Wait, to do it in the middle of the ocean… Well, if it was me from half a year ago, I wouldn't even imagine it."

In the place they felt safe about while they were glad to be alive, Hajime and Yue showed each other's body. For a while, the submarine was shaken by something other than the small waves.

* * *

"Seems you've been enjoying yourselves…"

After being refreshed from various ways, they returned inside the submarine and were stared at by Shia.

"Ng? You are awake, eh. How's your condition?"

"Acting as if nothing happened, but I am thankful for the worry. My drowsiness was blown away thanks to the intense shaking, the very entranced voices, and those fresh sounds. My physical condition is excellent from energy converted from emptiness and loneliness. Yeah, with this, I will be attacked, too, or so I thought."

"I see, then that's good."

Hajime was truly glad that Shia recovered, but since he didn't show any feelings of guilt, it made Shia, "Uu~," groaned with teary eyes. Her appearance made Hajime thought he ignored her too much. Smiling wryly, he told her to make space and sat beside her.

Waking up without anyone inboard and hearing the sounds of Hajime and Yue making love from the opened hatch, made Shia truly lonely, and thus she hugged Hajime who sat beside her, tightly. Yue also sat by Shia's side, not Hajime's, and patted Shia's head to comfort her.

While the two were comforting Shia, Hajime supplied his magic power to start the submarine, advancing to the east. From time to time, they were attacked by demonic beasts, but were repulsed by Yue's magic, and they advanced for one full day. Having advanced through under the starry sky, Hajime finally caught the sight of land when the morning sunshine brightened the world.

According to the position of the stars they saw last night, the party was currently located in the north of Elisen. As such, as long as they moved towards the left side over the land, they would surely come to see the harbor along with Elisen and «Guryuu-en Great Desert».

Relieved from seeing land, they advanced south for two days.

When the sun reached the zenith on the second day, the party stopped the submarine to take a break, and had lunch above the submarine while being swayed by the wave. The menu was of course the fishes they caught in the sea. Using "Lightning-clad" to roast the food, made him recalled the time he was in the abyss. The party didn't have any cooking utensil or any seasoning because the "Treasure Box" was entrusted to Tio.

Even so, the fish the three happily ate while absentmindedly watching the horizon was quite the delish. The location and atmosphere were compensating for the seasoning. Those who lived in the sea, or opened a stall during a festival, all of them were uses this kind of compensation.

And when Shia was enjoying the roasted unknown fish, her rabbit-ears suddenly stood straight then began to move restlessly. Following that, "Nn?," Hajime also noticed a presence of something. Filling his mouth with a fish of about 60 centimeters in length, he moved his gaze.

Surrounding the submarine, *zoom!*, several people appeared from inside the sea and thrust their tridents. There were about 20 people. All of them have emerald green hair and ears that looked like fan-shaped fin. By their looks, they were a group of

Sea-dweller tribe. Their eyes were overflowed with caution and dangerously narrowed.

Among them, a man faced Hajime with thrust spear and asked him.

“Who are you? Why are you here? And what’s the thing you are riding on?”

Hajime was busy chewing the fish that filled his mouth to the point of his cheeks swelling. He didn’t plan on opposing them, so he wanted to answer quickly, but unfortunately the fish he was currently eating was chewy and large. It took time before he could swallow it.

Hajime took a serious pose, but considering how he calmly ate his meal even though spears were pointed at him while being surrounded, made others see him as nothing but an impudent fellow.

Veins appeared on the forehead of the man who asked him. Anyhow, even if they had their doubts, it was too much for them to be this menacing after finding humans in the sea. Shia thought of breaking the volatile situation by answering in the place of Hajime.

“Ah, umm, please calm down. We are…”

“Silent! A Rabbitman tribe like you should not open your mouth!”

The Rabbitman tribe’s position was low even among Demi-human race outside of the Sea of Trees. How they were strangely agitated and how they stubbornly wanted Hajime, who was looking down on them (from their POV), to answer them might also be a factor. Changing the target of his spear, the man grandly thrust the spear at Shia.

The attack of a Sea-dweller tribe would not pass through Shia’s defense with her strengthened body; the thrust spear would only shallowly cut Shia’s cheek even if she didn’t dodge it. The man probably wanted to slightly hurt her to give Hajime a warning. As expected, the party felt it was abnormal. After all, the Sea-dweller tribe wasn’t this fierce.

However, that was a bad move no matter what their circumstances were. No matter, if it was for a warning, Hajime would not let go those who tried to hurt Shia.

In a moment, huge killing intent and pressure poured down like a huge cataract, spreading on the sea’s surface like a ripple, causing rough waves.

BOOOOM!!!

With his eyes opened wide, the man who was staring at Hajime's sudden change was, blown away from his spot, accompanied by a loud sound. He bounced several times on the surface of the sea, flew while spinning, and finally sank into the sea.

With dumbfounded expressions, the remaining Sea-dweller tribe's members moved their gaze from the blown man to Hajime who somehow was gripping the tail of a large, roasted fish with a pose of someone having done a full golf's swing.

The splashing sea water was sparkling as it reflected the sunlight. Even the eyes of the dead fish were somehow shining.

"Wh-, wh-."

The Sea-dweller tribe's members were flustered.

Shouldering the somewhat eaten fish, Hajime glared at the man beside the blown away man. Needless to say, having received a pressure he never felt before, the man of Sea-dweller tribe thrust his spear while shouting as he panicked from being glared by Hajime.

"ZeeAAh!!"

Even in all of the man's life until now, it was an attack that satisfied him the most. Having premonition of death, he instinctively did a sure-kill attack. However, the sure-kill attack pierced into the mouth of the white eyed fish and was easily stopped.

"Eh? What? H-How…"

When Hajime swung the fish, the man was dumbfounded after seeing the unbelievable spectacle, and thus the spear was easily snatched. The swinging momentum made the spear fly out from the fish's mouth, directly hitting the face of another person of Sea-dweller tribe. Leering at the person from Sea-dweller tribe who groaned as the blood gushed out from his bleeding nose, Hajime once again swung fish.

The man whose spear was taken and thrown away had cramped cheeks because of the nonsensical scene of the white-eyed fish approaching his face with its opened mouth and somehow shining in bright red.

Then,

BAM!!!

"Hmmm?!"

He was blown away just like the man earlier.

"*Munch, munch… gulp…* Now then, I actually don't want to fight against the Sea-dweller tribe. As such, why don't we calm down and have a talk here? However, indeed I can't stay silent if someone tries to hurt my companion… Ah, the people blown away wouldn't die because I held back, okay?"

With the limp fish in one hand, which lost its shine, Hajime proposed after deactivating his "Pressure." Hajime himself didn't really want to fight the Sea-dweller tribe's people who were of the same tribe as Myuu. Although the other side tried to kill him, he actually didn't even see them as a neighbourhood uncle (totally ignoring them).

However, the Sea-dweller tribe didn't seem to accept his proposal. It was because their pride seemed to have been damaged by Hajime who looked down at them expressing "you are not even my match" even though humans were at a disadvantageous position in the sea, and he had blown away their comrades even though he said they didn't die.

Moreover, because of their abnormally high alert against the human race, they could not trust Hajime's words at all. *We must not let our guards down!* They took distance from Hajime's party, and took a stance ready to throw the short harpoons on their backs.

"I see. It's not enough to kidnapping that child, huh? That's why you come here again to kidnap other children of ours?"

"We won't give you the time to cast any magic! The sea is our territory, don't think you can return unhurt!"

"We will make you spit that child's location even if we need to chop your limbs!"

"Don't worry. We will keep you alive until we hand you over to the Kingdom. Your safety isn't guaranteed though."

It seemed to be an abnormal situation. Rather than being cautious, strong grudge could be seen lodged in their eyes. Hajime somehow understood the cause of their agitation from the words "kidnap other children." These people were likely to have misunderstood him as the one who kidnapped Myuu. Riding on unknown transportation and taking along a slave from Rabbitman tribe while wandering around the territory of Sea-dweller tribe… It wasn't so strange for a human like him to be misunderstood.

The Demi-human race held a very strong unity and affection towards their race. It was certainly so for their own race, but it was even stronger among their own tribe. Haulia tribe went out of the Sea of Trees just for Shia, while the Bearman tribe ignored the decision of the Chiefs' conference to take revenge on the one who injured their chief. Even the Sea-dweller tribe wasn't any different. Any children of their tribe are important, even they weren't their own.

Secretly, Hajime was sulking a little as he complained, "Even if she doesn't go her way to treat me as her father, she has these people treat her like their daughter, eh." The mutter mixed with a wry smile was aimed at Myuu who wasn't here. Following that, Hajime tried to say Myuu's name to solve the misunderstanding.

"Ah~, you know, about that kidna-…"

"Get 'em!!"

However, faster than his words, the Sea-dweller tribe began to throw the harpoons one after another. Even though the lower half of their bodies was underwater, treading on it, the harpoons were flying with a considerable speed and indeed they were aimed at the shoulders or feet, and not to kill them. In thoroughness, they were also stabbing the submarine which shook it intensely.

If it was a normal human, he would have his balance broken and would either be pierced by the harpoons from being unable of taking evasive maneuver or fall into the sea and suppressed by the Sea-dweller tribe. Well, if it was a normal human.

""Wave Castle.""

With Yue's mutter, the sea water compressed as it surged, obstructing the harpoons coming from all directions. Following that, while the Sea-dweller tribe were still astonished by the non-chanted magic, Yue made around 20 thunder balls floating around her.

At the same time the sound of upsurge seawater had literally became a rampart, returned to normal. The people of Sea-dweller tribe witnessed the floating and sparkling thunderballs around Yue.

"Kh!? R-Retreaaatt!!"

A scream of order rang out. The paled tribe members panicky turned on their heels to run away. However, they were too slow.

Fwoosh!! Bzz! BZzz! BzZZzz!!

Each of the thunder balls flew towards a different direction, not letting even one of the Sea-dweller tribe away… mildly electric shocked them.
"ABABABABABABABAh," such a scream could be heard from them. After a while, the 21 people of Sea-dweller tribe were floating on the surface.

"Yue, cheers for the good work."

"Nn… Hajime, about the thing these people were saying."

"Well, it must be about Myuu."

"A lot of things happened even when we were going to Elisen. As expected of Hajime-san. Not even having the time spent in a town, a problem had already appeared…"

"Please stop, Shia. I am actually a little worried about that, too… damnit. There should've been no problem here if Myuu was here…"

Hajime was sighing while he worried about it. Then, for the time being, he moved to gather the people of Sea-dweller tribe's drowned bodies.

* * *

After he instantly remodelled the sub by making a carrier where he put the afro-haired, white-eyed people of Sea-dweller tribe, the party continued their voyage.

Yue effectively weakened one of the thunders, which made the person immediately awake. That person guided the party into the harbor after they explained the situation to him.

At first, because Hajime knew Myuu's name and characteristics the man said, *'So you are the culprit after all!'*, as he raged. However, Hajime was already irritated, so he expressionlessly slapped him until the man calmed down, and the man heard the party's story after being disciplined.

Following that, when the party told him Myuu was currently in Ancadi and will immediately returned to Elisen. The man asked the party to allow him to tag along with them to Ancadi. For the man, he could not just swallowed Hajime's party's story without any proof, so he wanted to go along with the party to Ancadi to at least find a clue about Myuu.

Beside the young man before them who was guiding them, the people who previously were bellowing at Hajime were those who directly knew Myuu. Myuu's mother was also injured when Myuu was kidnapped, thus these people were

becoming emotional. And, because he would feel awkward when he reunites with Myuu after having beaten up her acquaintances, Hajime reluctantly accepted the young man's request.

Following that, after advancing on the sea for a few hours,

"Ah, Hajime-san! It has come into view! The town is! Finally, a place with people!"

"Nn? Ohh, it really is in the middle of the sea, eh."

Shia was pointing at «Elisen» with sparkling eyes and said to Hajime. Moving his gaze, indeed a big town floating above the sea had come into his view.

Hajime moved the submarine towards the place with a lot of protruding piers. After leering at the Sea-dweller tribe, human tourists and merchants who became pop-eyed after seeing Hajime riding on an unknown vessel, the party moored at a vacant spot.

The people of the Sea-dweller tribe came before the party, witnessed the tens of unconscious people of Sea-dweller tribe on the submarine's carrier, and raised a commotion. However, Hajime thought it would be okay because he had explained the situation to the young man, so for the time being, he and the young man unloaded the fainted people onto the pier.

After they did that, fully-armed people of Sea-dweller tribe and human soldiers had already crowded in. The young man took a step forward to explain the situation and began to talk like a big shot. Hajime had wanted to quickly return to Ancadi and meet Kaori's group so when he watched the young man, he became irritated and said inwardly, "Just decide who will travel with us already!"

Hajime wanted this to end peacefully, but it indeed couldn't be that smooth. Pushing aside the young man who was confused, the soldiers rushed to the party. Hajime's party were surrounded without a place to escape on the small pier.

"Be obedient. Let us restrain you until we can clarify the truth."

"Oi, oi, didn't you hear the story?"

"Of course. And it is better if we are the one who go to confirm it. There's no need for you to go."

Words without any chance of refusal. Hajime became even more irritated, but he controlled himself because here was Myuu's hometown.

"Listen here. Our companions are waiting for us there. But, even though we want to immediately head to Ancadi, didn't we come all the way here to return those who mistakenly attacked us?"

"Regardless if it was a misunderstanding or not… even if the kidnapped child is indeed in Ancadi, you're suspicious because you wandered around Elisen's territory on an unidentified vessel. There's no saying you won't run away on our way to Ancadi, right?"

"What's with this situation this time? If we want to run away, we can just annihilate these people and escape right after that."

"There's also that point. But, it didn't change that you entered our jurisdiction without permission. Furthermore, you attacked the vigilante corps that discovered you, there's no way we can release you that easily."

"It was them who didn't listen to us and attacked due to their agitation. Even so, you think we would obediently let you restrain us? … just cut it out already."

Hajime's eyes narrowed dangerously. The man who seemed to be the leader of the soldiers before him was frowning from the heavy aura overflowing from Hajime.

On the leader's chest was the badge with Herrlicht Kingdom's crest, surmising that he was the commander of the regiment sent under pretext of the Kingdom's protection. Among the Sea-dweller tribe, there were people who might be from the vigilante corps, and they didn't back away even though they were taken aback by Hajime's aura.

For Hajime, this place was Myuu's hometown and he didn't want any problem in Elisen since he thought it was likely to become the party's base because they would surely take time to search «Meljeene Bottom Sea Ruin», whose location was unknown. It was the truth that Myuu was in Ancadi, and he understood the suspicion could be solved. However, Hajime's hostility to the injustice in this world could be called a conditioned reflex. As such, he wouldn't easily accept this.

It was a truly explosive situation.

Within the raised tension, Hajime thought that he must not rampaging in Myuu's hometown, and by the time he wanted to concede,

"Nn? Just now…"

With her rabbit-ears moving about, Shia began to look around the sky. Hajime didn't look away from the commander and asked, "What is it?" However, before Shia could answer him, Hajime also felt a small presence and voice.

"—!"

"Ah? What?"

"—pa— !"

"Oy, it can't be!?"

"—Papaa~!"

Hajime hurriedly looked up and somehow a small shadow was falling from the empty sky!

With arms spread, the shadow that was free falling full of smile was…

"Myuu-!?"

That's right, it was Myuu. Myuu was skydiving. Without parachute. Looking carefully, behind her was the black dragonform of Tio, who was hurriedly descending, and riding on her back was Kaori who was also in a panic.

As soon as he recognized the falling shadow was Myuu, Hajime activated "Aerodynamic" and "Ground Shrinker." He immediately jumped from his spot, ignoring the pier that was blown by the impact and the soldiers screaming as they fell into the sea.

Hajime that had instantly jumped for more than 100 meters in height thanks to "Aerodynamic," to jump towards the place Myuu was going to fall through, and activated "Light Speed." Inside the slowed down world, he made sure Myuu was in his arms, and he fell with a regulated, miracle-like speed, perfectly nulled any kind of shock.

With Myuu in his embrace, Hajime used "Aerodynamic" to hop and bounced until he reached the ground. Inwardly, the cold sweat was flowing like a waterfall.

"Papa-!"

Without even knowing a shred of what Hajime was thinking, Myuu rubbed her face on Hajime's chest with a smiling face. Perhaps, it was Tio who told her Hajime was right under them.

Thus, although he didn't know whether it was accidental or perhaps deliberated, she fell towards Hajime. Seeing how she was smiling as she fell, there's no mistake she believed Hajime would surely catch her.

Even so, it took an extraordinary courage to do a free-fall with a full smiling face. *Restrain yourself!* Hajime retorted at the four year old child in his mind. Hajime was frowning as he thought of scolding her. But when they got to the ground, he patted Myuu.

[End of Book 09]